

ENGLISH: TEXT RESPONSE

On the Waterfront Essay: 'Father Barry and Edie Doyle are crucial in the moral redemption of Terry Malloy.' Do you agree?

In *On the Waterfront*, the lead character Terry Malloy ultimately does achieve his moral redemption, going from being a 'just a bum' to the 'contender' he had always dreamt of. Father Barry and Edie Doyle play a major role in this transformation as they present him with ethical alternatives in how one can live their life, and offer him guidance amidst the corruption of the waterfront. They are not crucial to his eventual success though, as Terry is depicted as an essentially good character that, while he is 'a bit lost', has the qualities required to allow him to return to the physical and metaphorical light. Glimmers of unease and tenderness are evident in his facial expressions and posture in the early parts of the film suggesting that, even if they are dormant to begin with, he contains the essential goodness required to allow him to achieve his redemption. Thus, while Father Barry and Edie do play a large role in this journey, it is ultimately Terry's own innate goodness and sense of right that guides him to do the right thing.

He undeniably does achieve this redemption, finishing the film as a rather heroic 'contender' of a character. At the beginning the viewer is introduced to a Terry who is, ultimately, 'just a bum', a largely simple and unthinking character who does as the mob tells him. It is apparent, in the way in which Brando hunches in on himself and furrows his brow uneasily, that Terry is aware, at least subconsciously, of the deep immorality he is committing. Hence in order to live freely he must redeem himself morally, not just earn forgiveness, as he must look at and accept what he has done. Terry does achieve this in the film, as he goes from this hang-dog character to a 'contender' at the end. By the conclusion, he has developed into a man who is not only able to understand his own morality, but also articulate both to himself and to others and act upon it. Through this, he is able to fulfil the requirements of his subpoena and 'tell the truth' in the court as his conscience tells him he must. Similarly, he is able to find the strength to make the walk, bloodied but unbeaten, to the docks at the end, effectively beating Johnny Friendly. In this he is able to achieve his moral redemption; he has listened to and developed his morals and acted on them, earning back his dignity and self-respect and making himself responsible for this journey.

Edie's role in it must not be overlooked, though, as she does provide hope and guidance to Terry through his difficult decisions. It is her probing demands of 'tell me who killed my brother' and 'help me' that force much of Terry's internal questioning, as he struggles to align how he behaves with who he wants to be in this blossoming relationship. Edie is also morally a beacon of light and goodness amidst the darkness of the waterfront corruption, depicted on film by Eva Marie-Saint's blonde and angelic appearance, offering Terry a view of what life could be should he testify. Previous to meeting Edie, the only people with whom he had constant interaction were members of the gang and the longshoremen, exposing him to a predominately violent and immoral world. With Edie, though, he is offered a vision of an alternative way of living. She believes in honesty and integrity, with her life philosophy being 'everyone should care for everyone else'. His exposure to this other world plays a large role in directing his journey to moral redemption, as he can at last see where listening to his morals can take him. Crucial to this is his growing love for Edie. She is 'the first good thing that ever happened' to him, and a desire to both protect her from Johnny Friendly's threats that he 'knows where the girl lives' and to live in a way that makes her happy, proud and loving in return drives many of his decisions. This is illustrated in the church, when his first instinct is to help Edie rather than join the mob on the other side. Hence, for her presentation of a different, more moral world and the optimistic love she inspires in Terry, Edie does play a role in his moral redemption.

Father Barry plays a similar role in this journey to morality. As he realises that his 'parish is on the waterfront', he begins to try and guide the longshoremen towards righteousness and honesty. Terry listens to these words, and the ethics Barry is trying to convey trickle into his psyche. This is

especially apparent in the sermon in the hold, as long shots of a troubled Terry quietly listening to Barry's declarations that 'God sees everything' convey the impact the words are having upon him. His preaching in his makeshift church of the waterfront on the Christian ideals of honesty, truth and integrity further nurture this growing consciousness, as he proclaims that it is a sin to remain 'deaf and dumb' while one's 'brothers are suffering'. The strong correlations he makes between the waterfront situation and the bible, suggesting that it almost is the bible relived, reinforce this as what he is proclaiming seems right in every sense of the word. This insinuates to Terry much of what he has already beginning, further strengthening the moral and ethical core growing inside of him.

While he provides this support on a broad scale, as he offers guidance to the entire waterfront, he also contributes to Terry's moral redemption in a much more personal way. As the film progresses, it becomes increasingly apparent that Father Barry is becoming a mentor and male role model to Terry on this journey, forcing him to look at what he has done and what it means. It is he that demands of Terry to question 'what about your soul', and tells him that he must confess his role in Joey Doyle's 'knock off' to Edie. He forces Terry to make the tough decisions and do what he sees as Christian and right (as the two are intrinsically linked in Schulberg's choice of dialogue for Father Barry), physically making him stop fighting after Charley's murder and also take 'the walk', bloodied and stumbling, to work in the final scene of the film. This role as a male mentor is especially important when considering the previous guidance of this sort that Terry would have received. Prior to this, the only solid relationships he had with adult men were with Charley and Johnny, who 'used to take him to ball games as a kid'. The morals and situations he would have been exposed to with them differ greatly to the concepts of honesty and integrity that Barry forces him to look at, suggesting that Terry's changes in mentor reflect his changing awareness morally.

What Father Barry fails to comprehend, though, is the immense pressure and wharf culture demanding that Terry doesn't 'rat'. Hence, Terry is left to make this decision without any guidance, and the way in which he acts on his core beliefs illustrates how he is, in the end, responsible for his own moral redemption. Terry is, even at the beginning, essentially a good and moral person. As early as the 'knock off' of Joey the viewer sees the glimmers of unease and consciousness in Brando's eyes and facial expression, while his tender treatment of the pigeons and Golden Warriors on the roof show his innate goodness and care. It is these qualities what are dormant and hidden under the gang's 'do it or else' orders at the start of the film, and that are gradually tested and accepted by Terry himself as the story progresses. While he is guided by the visions and ethical alternatives Edie and Father Barry offer him, it is ultimately this core goodness that leads him to his redemption. His biggest decisions and confrontations take place alone, with only his own conscience to direct him. One such situation is in the taxi with Charley, on the way to 'four thirty-seven River Street'. Here, Terry faces down what he 'coulda been' and the destructive role his brother and Johnny have played in his life, forcing himself to look at what the gang has actually done to him. The wistful way in which he declares he 'coulda had class, could be someone' shows his growing understanding that he can do better than the mob, leading him to make his accusations of 'it was you' to Charley lead only be his own awareness and belief. Likewise, it is Terry himself who must make the decision to testify against his 'friends', as Father Barry and Edie are unable to understand the loyalties and unspoken rules tugging on his conscience. In this choice, he is guided only by his own morality, making him ultimately responsible for his own redemption.

It is evident, then, that Terry Malloy is in the end the key cause of his moral redemption. While the guidance and support offered by Edie Doyle and Father Barry do play a part in it, it is Terry's own sense of right and his growing ability to act on it that allow him to testify in the court and make the 'walk'. He has listened to his own morals and acted in the way that best serves him, allowing him to achieve this redemption. Thus, by the conclusion of the film Terry 'ain't a bum' anymore but a 'contender', able to live with self-respect and dignity in the way that he knows to be right.