

ENGLISH: *ON THE WATERFRONT*

On the Waterfront is foremost a love story. Discuss.

Elia Kazan's film "On the waterfront" explores the effect of corrupt power within American society in the 1950s. The film was produced as a reflection of Kazan's decision to testify against his former colleagues before the "House of Un-American Activities Committee." To a small extent, the film does have an emphasis on the principles of love and compassion, as evident between the protagonist, Terry Malloy and Edie Doyle. More specifically, it is the positive effects of Edie's love for Terry on his conscience that is a main concern of the film. On the other hand however, more important issues such as, the characters' struggle to stand up for justice and make moral choices, rather than succumb to the deaf and dumb code, is also explored. In this way, it is evident how the film explores the idea of love on a small level, rather giving prominence to more potent issues.

Love derives from many sources and the film, to a small extent, explores how it can bring out the potential goodness in individuals. As Edie and Terry's relationship is developed through the film, Terry's growing love for Edie forces him to gradually realize that he belongs to a corrupt culture, possessing a tainted ideology: "Do it to him before he does it to you." The character of Edie is used by Kazan to show the development of Terry. In the scene where he picks up Edie's glove and slips it onto his hand, he expresses a desire for connection that he can't manage through words. In a sense, the white glove reflects Terry's urge to become pure like Edie. Furthermore, Terry eventually confesses his love and fear of losing her to Father Barry "I love her...she's the first nice thing that's happened to me". As a result, Edie's love encourages him to regain a hold on his morals and develop a different perspective of life where 'Everybody cares about everybody else'. She challenges his view of life, "Get rid of them, is that your idea?", and thus provokes him to stand up for his 'rights' In a corrupt and threatening environment, love between individuals seems inept to create change, but the film shows how love and support can act as a catalyst to bring out the potential goodness in people. Through Terry's character, the film shows the redemptive possibilities of love' how one can improve with the aid of faith, compassion and support.

Similarly, the film also gives credence to the idea that it is possible to rise above an impoverished and dysfunctional upbringing; individuals do possess the potential to eventually emerge as heroes as demonstrated by the protagonist, Terry Malloy. Decision making is portrayed in the film, as a matter of life and death. Raised in a harsh environment, Terry initially struggles for redemption and fails to testify against the corrupt waterfront commission. For the majority of his life, he like many was controlled by Johnny Friendly. Terry's blind loyalty to Friendly's mob makes him unwilling to see their cynical use of him. However, as the film develops, he begins to question his conscience and whether he "could've been someone." This struggle with conscience is ultimately evident in the lighting used in the cab scene with Terry and Charlie. The flashes of dark and light shades upon Terry's face ultimately reflect his struggle with right and wrong. Although, he is initially indecisive, after the murder of his brother, the trigger is finally pulled at his conscience. As evident in the closing scene, Terry gains the courage to overthrow Friendly stating that "Your guts is all in your wallet and your trigger finger!" and restore a sense of justice on the docks; he, as a "pigeon" defeats the "city-hawk." Ultimately, this sense of triumph is demonstrated by the low-angle shot of a defeated Friendly. As a result, it's clear that that the film is not entirely based on a love story but the positive effects love has on pursuing justice.

On the other hand, the prominent issue of the abuse and corruption of power is a more obvious theme highlighted, through the cruel waterfront union leader, Johnny Friendly. The greed and hunger for money and status blinds Friendly, leading him to abandon all sense of right and wrong. The immoral manipulation and control he had over the dockworkers gives off the sense of injustice. Friendly's oppressive nature is ultimately evident through the callous tactics he uses to eliminate those who attempt to betray him, through testifying; "You just dug your own grave. Go fall into it" Moreover, the impact of Friendly's power is illustrated through the death of Joey Doyle; as his

father, Pop Doyle states, “I kept telling' him: don't say nothin', keep quiet, you'll live longer.” In this sense, it is evident how Johnny is a merciless and unforgiving individual; he manipulates the union members, punishing his own associates when they step out of line and arranging the murder of those who try to betray him. Thus, it is evident that the inhumanity with which Friendly treats his workers largely overrides any notion of love and compassion in the film.

Elia Kazan's film “On the waterfront”, presents the community numbed by fear into the “deaf and dumb” code. Though the love-story between the protagonist, Terry and Edie is explored to a small extent, the positive consequences of another's love on one's conscience are more evident; Edie's love for Terry encourages him to reassess himself in terms of his morals and values. On the other hand however, the idea of the pursuit of justice and the abuse of power are more apparent in the film's storyline; as demonstrated by Terry's eventual courage to stand up for the truth and Johnny Friendly's malicious behaviour.