

ENGLISH: *ON THE WATERFRONT*

On the Waterfront is foremost a serious film. 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." The film's genre is primarily serious as it is based on realistic issues that were arising during Kazan's time. In the midst of all the crime and injustice, the characters in the film struggle to stand up for themselves and make moral choices; rather, they succumb to the 'deaf and dumb' code of silence established on the docks, by the corrupt union leader, Johnny Friendly. In this way, it is evident how the film ultimately explores potent issues in society, rather than adopting a superficial storyline; it is essentially a crime film.

The prominent issue of the abuse and corruption of power is a recurring theme highlighted through the vicious 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. As a result, his name, "Friendly" is rather ironic, as he is anything but; he simply exercises control and manipulation of the dockworkers. 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 you 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. Ultimately, Friendly's authority can be likened to the hooks which hang above the workers heads; one wrong move and the workers are punished. Thus, the inhumanity with which Friendly treats his workers is in no doubt, a serious and realistic matter throughout the film, one that is evident, even in today's society.

Moreover, the film gives credence to the notion that it is possible to rise above an impoverished and dysfunctional upbringing; individuals do possess the potential to eventually emerge as heroic human beings 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" as he meets the innocent, Edie Doyle and Father Barry; a priest who isn't afraid to stand up for justice. 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. In this way, the film demonstrates how pursuing justice is not always an easy task. However, through developing a positive conscience, even the most unlikely of individuals, can emerge as heroes.

The director used the character of Edie to showcase the seriousness of the issue as Edie is an innocent young lady who had a strict upbringing by nuns are suddenly exposed to the real corrupted world of the waterfront. Edie Doyle tried to bring justice back to her brother's death as she sacrifice her innocence and stayed back to witness the reality of the waterfront condition. There is a lack of comedy as the main issue that is trying to be justified is the crime and violence with the use of the black and white filming. The film is based on real events that took place on the New York and New Jersey waterfronts. The leaders of the International Longshoremen's Association were discovered to be a corrupted union where workers were left out in the cold as the big bosses grew rich on their

labours, and the protests being made were met with violence and intimidation. As portrayed in the film the Longshoremen all depended on Johnny for the opportunity to work. Most of these workers keep their heads down, enduring the injustice and the ruthless tactics of Friendly's mob, partly because they are too frightened and intimidated to do anything else. Having readjusted their expectations, the ordinary waterfront workers simply want to survive.

Elia Kazan's film "On the waterfront", presents the community numbed by fear into the code of "Deaf and Dumb" by the corrupt waterfront mob. It is evident that Johnny Friendly the head of the union is a powerful man whose greed blinds his morality resulting in the oppression and manipulation of the dockworkers. Moreover, another vital issue explored throughout the film is the struggle for justice, as depicted through the protagonist, Terry Malloy; initially he is portrayed as rather cowardly as he refuses to proclaim the truth, but eventually emerges as a hero after conquering Johnny Friendly.