

ENGLISH: *ON THE WATERFRONT*

“The struggle of an ordinary man with his conscience”. Is this how you saw “On the Waterfront”?

From his arrogant chewing of gum, his confused shuffles, to his nervous gestures, Elia Kazan’s “On the Waterfront” highlights the internal struggle of a conflicted and ambivalent young protagonist, Terry Malloy. His entire life is spent on the unforgiving and brutish outskirts of the Hoboken docks, which have left him scarred physically and mentally. From the onset, Terry is shown to be an insignificant individual in a world of “hawks”. His path to redemption is weighed down by his conscience as he struggles to discern a clear distinction between right and wrong, and he has trouble deciding where his loyalties lie. On his tedious journey Terry meets love interest Edie Doyle and voice of reason Father Barry; both of whom shake him out of moral paralysis, galvanizing him to do what is just. The monochromatic color scheme complements the film Noire style, the two intertwined with Kazan’s filmic techniques and misc en scene, which all act as the medium for Malloy’s journey to redemption.

From the outset, Terry Malloy is a “bum” who must overcome adversity to defeat the oppression and corruption brought by the Waterfront union. He holds a pragmatic set of views on life, as he knows that self-preservation must be prioritized in order to survive the harsh conditions of the waterfront. His belief is that you must “stand with the right people”, and would rather act “deaf and dumb” to avoid trouble. He has assimilated into the group of longshoremen who turn a blind eye against corruption, favoring a life under tyranny than standing up for themselves. However, Malloy undergoes a shift in character with the murder of Joey Doyle. Terry’s indirect involvement in his murder shows signs of regret, evident through his passivity in the initial bar scene with Johnny Friendly. He starts to question the dark values the Waterfront union holds: “I thought they was gonna’ kick him a bit”. Marlon Brando’s tortured expressions, lack of eye-contact and inarticulate mannerisms depict Malloy as a “confused kid” who has yet to find his bearings.

“That thing about conscience” inhibits Terry, causing him to reevaluate his identity and position in the world. More specifically, he is aware of what might happen to him if he did choose to “sing” and confess his knowledge. To “testify against what right against what is wrong is” could potentially cost him his life, something which he learns the hard way with Joey’s death. Contemplating his moral beliefs, Terry falters under the pressure, since he does not have the capacity to process his overwhelming guilt: “Conscience... that stuff can drive you crazy!” Joey’s death illustrates that any “birds” who “squeal” will ultimately fail; the mob holds too much power over the longshoremen. This is referred to in the scene of Kayo Dugan’s untimely death. Here, Kazan’s camera is tilted down, so the audience sees the longshoremen from the mob’s point of view. Two of Johnny’s men in “camel-hair suits” gaze intently down at Father Barry’s crucifixion speech like “hawks” ready to swoop on their prey. Father Barry tries to appeal to the men’s moral conscience by comparing Dugan’s death with a “crucifixion”, and advocates that his death should not be in vain. However, the way the two goons tower above the cargo-hold shows the mob’s unrelenting supremacy, since they are literally above them both in stature and power.

Depicted in pristine white clothing and starkly different from the hellish waterfront, Edie Doyle is the film’s elegant beauty that assists Terry with his moral dilemma. Blonde and beautiful, Terry is immediately captivated and love-struck by both her looks and her moral absolutism, believing that she was “the best thing that ever happened to me”. Although Terry is initially skeptical of Edie’s “naïve” and hopeful views on life, his growing love for her changes this. It is this affection that encourages Terry to become more open to Edie’s lectures on “moral conscience” and responsibility. So, Terry feels pressured to cleanse his conscience, the guilt from his knowledge of Joey’s death eating away at him. Kazan mutes Terry’s blurted confession with the blare-horn from a shipping freight. This allows the audience to focus on the two’s expressions. Terry is visibly in agony, his features contorted as he pleads for her forgiveness. With his impending revelation, Edie’s eyes

widen in horror, her gloves raised to shield herself from the truth. Here, Kazan tries to alleviate Malloy of his guilt, but Malloy ultimately fails as Edie is obviously traumatized from what she hears.

Father Barry is Terry Malloy's moral compass, spurring him on to end the mob's omnipresent grasp over the waterfront. Father Barry's famous "crucifixion speech" provokes the longshoremen with the knowledge that by remaining "D and D" everyone shares the "guilt" of Dugan's death. Father Barry rallies all of the workers to take a stand and listen to their moral conscience. However his words are in vain; the men return to their ordinary lives, choosing ignorance to be bliss. Instead, his words do inspire Terry Malloy, who is clearly fervent after his speech. When a barrage of fruit is thrown at Father Barry, Terry defends him by throwing a punch at Tullio – illustrating Terry's renewed vigor to seek justice against corruption. Ultimately, it is his brother's death that acts as a catalyst for Terry to redeem himself. Charley Malloy's premature death at the hands of his own boss makes Terry revert back to his old barbaric ways. His bloodlust to "take it out of their skulls" blinds him from adhering to his moral conscience, and he is on the cusp of doing something he would likely regret. However, Father Barry placates a violent and deranged Terry, insisting that he "fight Johnny in the courtroom, with the truth". When Terry does not listen, Father Barry throws a punch at Terry, almost as if to wake him out of his moral slumber. This seems to work, as Brando portrays Malloy with a calmer expression afterwards. Father Barry's presence, in conjunction with his brother's murder convinces Terry to settle the turbulence in his heart by fulfilling his moral obligations.

At the beginning of the film, Terry was a hollow man who only cared for himself, gaining a "couple of extra potatoes" here and there to support himself. With the film's end, Terry realizes that only through admitting his knowledge of the injustices of the waterfront can he purge his "moral conscience". Terry is now a man who holds his convictions close to his heart, paving the way for all waterfront men to live a life free from the mob's terror. Ironically it was not his physique as a former boxing champion that saw his victory, but his moral identity and undying will to seek justice. Limping across the pier bloodied and battered, Terry may have "lost the battle" but he has "won the war". The longshoremen choose to follow Terry into the wrought iron-gates instead of staying with the ruthless Johnny Friendly.