

Terry malloy as a
hero: individual
conscience above
community loyalty



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In *On The Waterfront*, Elia Kazan chronicles the transformative journey of an inarticulate, but sensitive Terry Malloy; exploring the ensuing battle within his conscience as it grapples with his growing sense of morality. Terry steps into stride as his own man, shedding chains of dependence from his brother Charley. The film captures Terry's shifts in ethical perception through his interactions with the characters that populate the Waterfront. From the virginal guiding force of Edie Doyle to the tyrannical grip of Johnny Friendly, Schilberg and Kazan create a world in which a bumbling 'ex tanker' with no moral vocabulary is deemed a hero by speaking out against the injustices of a silenced community. However to do so he challenges the prevailing reticence of people on the Waterfront. In this way, Kazan gives insights into the value of the individual at times when there is no pulse of self thought in a community.

The relationships forged by circumstance on the Waterfront bring Terry to re-examine the very core of his being. From the onset of the film, the audience is introduced to Terry as a naive, uneducated 'bum' who does as he is told. After being unknowingly accessory to the Joey Doyle hit, an incredulous Terry who thought, 'they was only gonna lean on him a lil' bit,' cannot seem to completely grasp the magnitude of his situation. Though he recognizes, 'he was a good kid,' Terry's vocabulary is devoid of any moral substance; he cannot express any real emotion, preferring instead the apathetic, 'lonno'. However in considering Terry's character, the audience must too appreciate the context in which he has grown up; the cold, gritty culture of the Waterfront that preaches 'Deaf n Dumb' and encourages a calloused sense of justice.

These traits are not shared by Edie Doyle and Father Barr- outsiders to the Waterfront. The two characters share an idealised view of people that sees them compelled by Christianity, fairness and brotherhood ('Shouldn't everyone care about everyone else?'). Following Terry and Edie's escape from the Church, the two shy away from eye contact; yet from the instant their gazes lock, there is a palpable attraction reinforced through the uplifting violins in the background. The audience sees Terry's infatuation of Edie to surface this courteous and graceful man, disarmingly natural in demeanor. Terry feels at ease with Edie and as his care for her grows, it is only championed by her plea to, 'help me for God's sake'. Kazan chooses to shoot the scene as a close-up of Terry to capture every sliver of body language that lends itself to unease; his quivering lip and incessant rubbing of his chin. The scene represents a situation Terry's heart has never experienced before and yet we see his swift change in priorities from a fear of Johnny Friendly, to Edie being 'sore at [him]'. Thus, it is evident that Terry's belief in something more profound than his own well being provides him with clarity; the ability to see past the person he is, to the person he needs to become.

The voice of every man and woman on the Waterfront has been stamped into submission through years of playing witness to the warped reality of Hoboken; singing 'like a canary' meant your wings would be put to the test. Traditionally, the community has given in to Johnny Friendly's regime, in fear of repercussion. As a result, the concepts of loyalty and disloyalty are severely blurred. 'Loyalty' as seen by the audience is allegiance to the dominant set of social values; as such, the longshoremen believe that, 'you

don't ask no questions, you don't answer no questions'. As Terry comes to realise he's been, 'rattin' on [himself] all these years', he learns of loyalties beyond the Waterfront- to the dignity of fair work and the all encompassing "good", that challenges Johnny Friendly's "evil". In his transition, he is revealed to truths he has never considered. The Golden Warriors, a club founded by, 'the original Golden Warrior' Terry, is not what he had once thought it to be. As Champ sheds tears at the pigeon coop, he exclaims, 'A pigeon for a pigeon!' in reference to his murder of Terry's birds. Just as it is for Terry, a blind is thrust open for the audience. We identify that the teenagers wanted to be just like Terry; not in terms of his character, but his position in society ('standing with the right people'). They aspire for that, 'little bit of change inkling in [their] pocket' knowing full well of the corruption it is tainted with.

The situation created by Kazan now calls upon a hero to liberate the Waterfront and cleanse its all encompassing influence. Enter- the new Terry Malloy. The struggle and redemption of one man on the Waterfront parallels the emancipation of an entire people. When Terry confronts Johnny Friendly, he is only there to get his own rights, but with Father Barry as an advocate of the Church, Terry's staggered steps through the arched doors are as meaningful to the longshoremen as they are to Terry. Father Barry does not abide to the conventional mold of a priest seen in films of past eras; he is no, 'gravy train rider with a turned around collar'. He steps out of the Church to do the work of God as he bears witness to the reality of Hoboken. The Father displays indignation in relation to the treatment of the dockworkers, but as a man, "new to the real world", he fails to comprehend why they

cannot speak out. In this way, Kazan enables the character to be real; his idyllic views on people and the supreme power of good ('testifying for what you know is right, against what you know is wrong') leave him ignorant to the blatant truth of the Waterfront. Furthermore, he is no saint; he drinks and smokes in times of disconcertion. These minor traits add layers to his character and more importantly, make him susceptible to the human condition.

Whilst this is usually likened to weaknesses, it also provides Father Barry with a capacity for deeper relationships. We see this through his adoption as surrogate father to Terry. When Terry is ready to wreak his own vengeance, Father Barry talks him down by absorbing his rage and redirecting it to a path that can "really hurt [Friendly]"- to "fight him in the courtroom with the truth". For the duration of this scene we see the Father's eyes intensely focused on Terry's eyes. Piercing into and revealing the inner turmoil that is unfolding. He also knocks him to the ground, unloading the tough love that Terry never receives from Charley. It is only through this relationship that Father Barry is able to rally Terry to 'win the war' not only for himself- but for the entirety of the Waterfront.

The opening of Terry's perceptions brings him to violate the loyalties of a community in order to free them. Perhaps Schilberg's and Kazan's message could be the importance of freedom of thought. The longstanding oppressive culture of the Waterfront would have continued in the unfair treatment of decent men, if not for the ability of one person to change and gain insight. Terry learns the value of the 'truth as [he] knows it' and in telling it, his

voice resonates with a community; thus painting Terry Malloy as the hero of the Waterfront.