

A critical analysis of 'on the waterfront'



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On the Waterfront was released in 1954. The film received eight academy awards securing it's place as an American cult classic. The film is about Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando), a young boxer-turned longshoreman who struggles to stand up to the corrupt Dockers Union with the help of Edie Doyle (Eva Marie Saint), and Father Barry (Karl Malden). Edie is the sister of Joey Doyle, a murdered victim of the mob.

As the film progresses so does Edie and Terry's love for each other. This film fits in perfectly with Vladimir Propp's 'film as fairy tale'. In the film Terry plays the role of the hero as it is up to him to give evidence, Edie plays the role of the princess as she is the sister of Joey Doyle who is the victim and also because she falls in love with Terry. Johnny Friendly is the leader of the Union which makes him the villain and Father Barry is the donor because he helps Terry realise what Terry must do.

The film begins with Terry leading Joey onto the roof where he is murdered by the Mafia. This establishes that the film is not going to be a joyful movie, but is going to be a movie about crime and murder. As this is happening we can hear very powerful music which is also a little eerie. I believe that this adds to the tension and helps the audience to believe that this is not going to be a cheerful movie.

As this happens the union is established as the bad guys in the movie. This is shown by their use of black humour for example while Joey Doyle was falling a member of the mob said ' he can sing, but he can't fly'. Joey Doyle had leaked some information about the corruption in the docks to the police so he was being punished for it. This is what they implied when they said ' he

can sing, but he can't fly'. They meant he could talk but he couldn't stop them from killing him.

The middle of the movie concentrates on Terry Malloy growing affection for Edie and also while this is happening Terry is growing further away from the Union. They begin to punish Terry for hanging around with Edie by making him work. Terry is shown as a caring and gentle person when he is fingering Edie's glove. I believe this is when Terry realises that he cannot have both Edie and his respect from the mob and struggles to decide which one means more to him.

In this film there are many issues. Read Stealing by Carol Duffy analysis One of these issues is poverty. The people that work on the docks in New York, the longshoremen, work by unloading the docks everyday. They get paid for a day's work and might not get work everyday. Even if they do get paid it is still not that much.

This leads to another issue, power. On the docks the union have the power. They give work to people who pay a share of their earnings to them. If longshoremen don't pay then they do not get work. If a longshoreman goes behind the union's back (e. g.

by going to the police) then they are punished. As a result of this the longshoremen are 'd and d'. This stands for deaf and dumb, they do not hear anything and they do not say anything. Family loyalty is also an issue in this film although it is a strong issue. For most of the film Terry shows his brother respect and it is the same with Edie and her father. Love is also a strong issue in the film; the film is based on Edie and Terry's love.

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This film fits in with Propp's film as fairytale which must mean there has to be a hero and a princess and they have to fall in love with each other. Terry Malloy plays the main role in this film as he is the hero; this is shown in many ways throughout the picture. Terry is introduced at the beginning of the film as a naive, young, not too bright man. Though he is the main character in the picture he Marlon Brando not say that much.

This is very much due to the fact that he is a method actor. This means that he acts more through body language. Throughout the film I believe that the audience would feel that Terry is a tough guy but has a lot of emotions and feelings buried inside of him trying to burst out, we can see this when he is fingering Edie's glove. I believe that through the beginning of the movie and through the middle Terry is having mixed feelings and is being torn up in two from inside from his growing feelings for Edie and his love for his brother and the union.

A way that Terry is shown as the hero is by wearing light coloured clothing. The movie was in black and white and by showing the hero in light colours helped show that he was good. In a way Terry Malloy was only a false hero until the death of his brother Charlie. Another way to tell that Terry was the hero was by the actions he took in the film and also what he received. In the movie Edie asks Terry to help her find out about Joey Doyle's death. By doing this the hero is given a mission.

Then the villain harms a member of the family. This happens when both Edie and Terry's brothers, Charlie and Joey are killed. After that the hero receives help from the donor in the film, Father Barry. In the end of the film Terry

goes off to fight Johnny Friendly and gets beaten up by the rest of the mob. Finally at the end the rest of the dock workers realise that Terry's the hero and the dockworkers win.

The villain in this movie is Johnny Friendly, the corrupted leader of the Dockers Union. He would get his money by taking a share of the longshoreman's profits. If they didn't pay him then they would not receive work. If anyone crossed John Friendly then they would have another thing coming to them. He is a mafia style leader and gains power by putting fear in others.

John Friendly had taken a shine towards Terry Malloy. I believe that John Friendly thought of him like a son. This changed when Terry fell in love with Edie Doyle. From the beginning of the relationship John Friendly had warned Terry not to get involved with her. Terry did not take the advice and so was given hard jobs on the docks to teach him a lesson.

I believe that Johnny Friendly was a kind man, however this was only seen to his close friends. An example of this was when he stuck up for Terry when the other gang members were teasing him. This did not make him a good man though; he still unfairly took money from the longshoremen and kept power by force. He was so powerful that he could give favours and then take them back.

Terry was often referred to as 'a bum'. This is because he would get easy jobs at the docks and also because he was the brother of Charlie. When he fell in love with Edie his image began to change. I think that falling in love made him grow soft.

Then it became obvious to me that slowly throughout the film people will start to like him again. The first person to realise Terry as a changed man was Father Barry. This was when Terry showed he had the guts to own up to his part in Joey Doyle's death. I think that love is important in a story that fits 'film as fairytale'. I believe that it gives the hero another kind of strength, one that the donor cannot give (unless the donor is also the princess in the story). Another reason I believe it is important is because people are now used to seeing love in a movie.

If they see that it is not there sometimes the viewer might think that something is missing in the movie. A good thing about this film is its use of camera angles. In most scenes with Terry the camera is looking up at him. By looking up to him I think it is a way of saying he is the hero.

Another good use of camera angle in the film is when Terry and Edie talk. A lot of the time when the two were talking an over the shoulder shot was taken then. This makes it more interesting as you can see the facial expressions clearer. One of my favourite scenes in the movie was the scene in the taxi.

Though it is obvious that the taxi is not moving the acting is good enough for the audience to overlook that flaw. In the taxi Terry blames his brother Charlie for making his life harder. This is a really famous scene and also has a really famous phrase: 'I could've been a contender'. I find this phrase very powerful and I'm sure it will stay in my mind for a long time. Terry Malloy says this because he was in a number one contender match.

If he won that match he could've gone for the title but instead John Friendly bets against him to make a lot of money as Terry was the favourite with the bookies. It is a very emotional scene where Terry gets a lot off his chest. He blames his brother for ruining his life and making him into ' a bum'. Another emotional part of this scene is when Terry takes the gun off Charlie because Terry knows that Charlie would never kill him. In this scene Charlie Malloy is playing the role of the false Hero and in a way also the donor; he gives Terry a gun and apologises for being a bad brother.

He also reassures Terry that he is on Terry's side. I believe it was quite obvious the violence wasn't real but was good for a 1950s film. I think this because I could tell that the punches in the end were obviously not hitting the other person. At the end I think it was a good idea to have Terry Malloy being beaten up out of our view.

It leaves us to imagine what was happening instead of seeing punches that were never landed. I did not like the ending scene much. I believe that the film ended too suddenly. I also found the ending quite predictable. I believe that the ending should've been Johnny Friendly being found guilty instead of all the longshoremen turning their backs on John Friendly and walking into a hanger. I also didn't like the fact that Terry Malloy could've walked into the hanger even though it was showing through his eyes that he was on the verge of fainting.

I believe it was a good idea to show us what Terry Malloy was seeing but it would've been more real if they showed that Terry fainted in the end. Apart from the ending I enjoyed watching this film.