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Author(s): Kenneth Hey

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AMBIVALENCE AS A THEME IN ON THE WATERFRONT (1954): AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO FILM STUDY

KENNETH HEY

Brooklyn College of the City University of New York

THE STUDY OF FILM IN AMERICAN CULTURE POSES SOME INTERESTING challenges to the person using an interdisciplinary method. First, as an historical document, film has contextual connections with the contemporary world. The people who make a film bring to the project their own interests and attitudes, and these various perspectives, when added to the collaborative process, forge a product which resonates in some way with society. Second, as a work of art, film requires textual analysis similar to drama, photography, painting, and music. But as an aesthetic object which combines different artistic media into a single experience, film requires an analytical method which considers all contributing disciplines. Finally, as an art historical object, film stands at the intersection of ongoing traditions in the medium's own history and of theoretical interests alive at the time the film is made. To single out one feature of the film (e.g., its historical context or a self-contained meaning in the text) is to sacrifice the film for something less. To avoid examining the relative contributions of all the major participants is to miss the unique feature of this collaborative art form.

As an example of the collaborative film process and as an object of cultural significance, *On the Waterfront* (1954) has few competitors. Bringing together some of the best and most innovative artists in their respective media, the film was an attempt to weave together the threads of two contemporary events with the strands of aesthetic themes derived from several different artistic media. Unlike many intriguing films which lose their appeal as society changes, this twenty-five-year-old film continues to evince the intended moral outrage from viewers ignorant of its

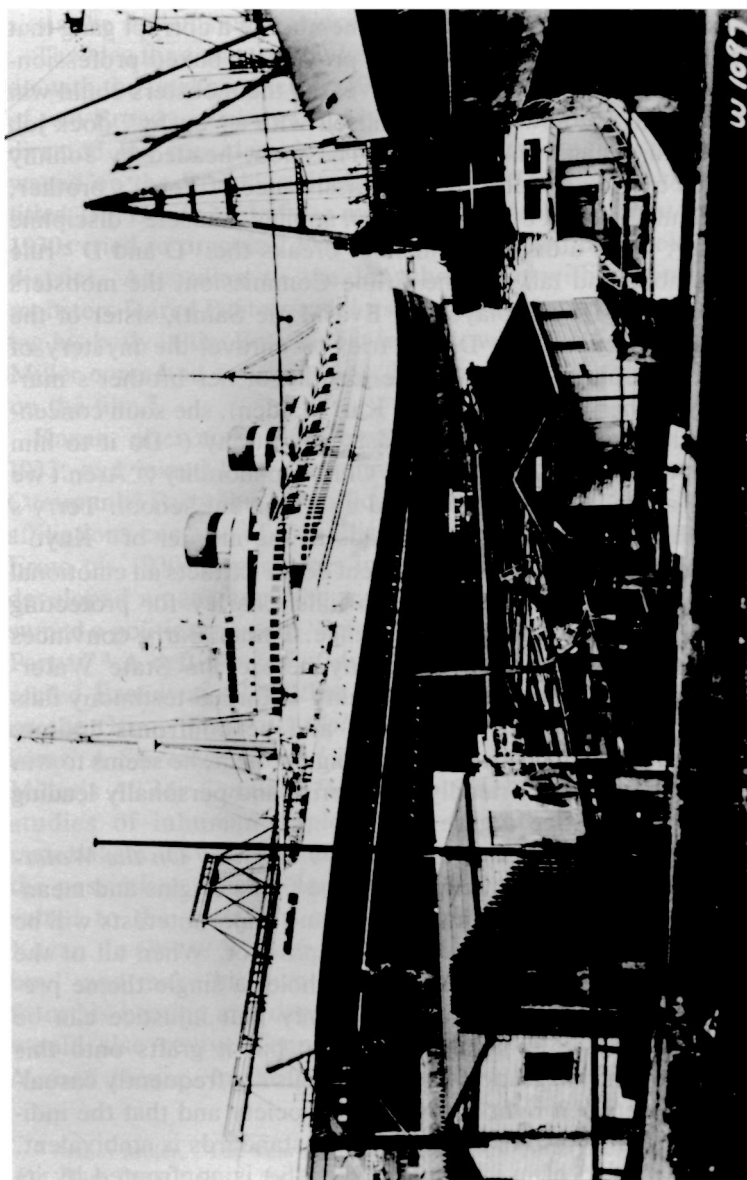


Figure 1. The dockside establishing shot includes most of the objects which play a prominent role in the film—the cross, the looming ships, the mobsters' dingy shack—and several of the visual motifs which reappear throughout the story—diagonal lines leading to foreshortened spaces, tension between positive and negative spaces, and protruding, unbalanced vertical lines. (Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.)

historical background and to receive harsh criticism from detractors aware of the film's origins.¹

On the Waterfront tells of Terry Malloy (played by Marlon Brando) who begins as an ignorant and complacent member of a corrupt gang that controls the longshoreman's union. Terry previously boxed professionally for the mob and obediently took "a dive" so the mobsters could win big on the opponent. He now contents himself with a "cushy" dock job and a "little extra change on the side." The mob, headed by Johnny Friendly (played by Lee J. Cobb) with the assistance of Terry's brother, Charley "the Gent" (played by Rod Steiger), applies "muscle" discipline where necessary; when a dissident member breaks the "D and D" rule ("Deaf and Dumb") and talks to the Crime Commission, the mobsters have him killed. Edie Doyle (played by Eva Marie Saint), sister of the film's first murder victim, Joey Doyle, tries to unravel the mystery of union corruption, hoping to uncover the identity of her brother's murderer. Joined by Father Barry (played by Karl Malden), she soon concentrates her attentions on Terry, whose basic philosophy ("Do it to him before he does it to you") clashes with the Christian morality ("Aren't we all part of each other") she has absorbed at a convent school. Terry's indifference to Edie's pleas eventually leads to the murder of "Kayo" Dugan (played by Pat Henning), whose violent death extracts an emotional eulogy from Father Barry. After the mob kills Charley for protecting his brother, the younger Malloy seeks revenge. Father Barry convinces Terry to vent his anger in open testimony before the State Waterfront Crime Commission. But the impersonality of formal testimony fails to appease Terry's desire for vengeance, and he confronts Johnny Friendly directly. Although he loses the ensuing fist fight, he seems to win a "battle" by circumventing Friendly's authority and personally leading the men back to work. (See Figure 1.)

The following study will seek to explain how and why *On the Waterfront* came to be. As a method of explaining the film's origins and meaning, each collaborator's career, point of view, and major interests will be discussed briefly and fitted into the evolving product. When all of the artists' efforts are considered as part of the whole, a single theme predominates: ambivalence. The film argues openly that injustice can be remedied through existing political institutions; but it grafts onto this basic liberal position the suggestion that individuals are frequently casualties of the conflict between right and wrong in society and that the individual's response to the clash of absolute moral standards is ambivalent. In the film, the "thesis" of evil (Johnny Friendly) is confronted by its

¹ For example, see Roger Tailleux, "Elia Kazan and the House Un-American Activities Committee," *Film Comment*, 2 (Fall 1966), 43-59.

“antithesis” of good (Father Barry and Christian morality); the new “synthesis” (Terry Malloy) miraculously fuses selfishness and selflessness, but as an individual staggering beneath the burden of moral decisions, he remains unconvinced of the rightness of either extreme.

The idea for a waterfront drama came from a person who had nothing to do with the final product. In 1949, Arthur Miller, flushed with the success of two Broadway plays (*All My Sons*, 1947; *Death of a Salesman*, 1949), directed his considerable talent toward the social struggle then being waged on the Brooklyn docks. His play, *The Bottom of the River* (also titled *The Hook*) told of the misadventures of Peter Panto who in the late 1930s tried to organize dissident longshoremen in Brooklyn’s Red Hook district. According to the longshoremen with whom Miller talked, mobsters feared Panto’s rapid rise to popularity and had him killed, dumping his body in the East River. In 1951, when the first script was finished, Miller contacted colleague Elia Kazan, suggesting that they work jointly on the film.²

Kazan, after completing his studies at the Yale School of Drama in 1932, had joined both the innovative Group Theatre and the energetic Communist Party, but his radical fervor soon waned and he severed Party affiliations because of a conflict over artists’ prerogatives and freedoms. From his 1930s experiences in dramatic art and radical politics, Kazan developed an aesthetic theory which favored optimistic realism and assumed a political posture “left of center and to the right of the Communist Party.”³ A deft creator of dramatic tension on stage, Kazan usually directed Broadway plays that projected his liberal ideas. From his work on the Group Theatre’s *Golden Boy* to his direction of Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire* (play, 1947; film, 1951) and of Arthur Miller’s *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman*, Kazan had helped shape studies of inhuman exploitation, bestial degradation, and aimless materialism, as well as statements concerning moral responsibility. But the pessimism which often infused these social dramas was not wholly suited to the optimism of a scrapping and successful immigrant like Kazan. In *On the Waterfront*, he would resurrect Clifford Odets’ “golden boy” and make his own “original golden warrior,” Terry Malloy, rise from his beating and depose momentarily his corrupt adversary. Kazan would also revive Tennessee Williams’ characters from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. In the play, Kazan had directed Vivien Leigh to play

² Arthur Miller, “The Year It Came Apart,” *New York* (Dec. 30, 1974–Jan. 6, 1975), 42. For Peter Panto’s story, see Allen Raymond, *Waterfront Priest* (New York: Henry Holt, 1955), 65–66.

³ Elia Kazan, cited in Michel Ciment, *Kazan on Kazan* (New York: Viking, 1974), 20; quote in following paragraph, 71.

Blanche DuBois as "an ambivalent figure who is attracted to the harshness and vulgarity" surrounding her at the same time she fears and rejects it. For the waterfront drama, Kazan would transfer the character ambivalence to Terry Malloy, converting Blanche DuBois into an effective Edie Doyle, and the befuddled Mitch into a forceful Father Barry (both played by Karl Malden). Stanley Kowalski and Terry Malloy (both played by Marlon Brando) would share several characteristics—an inability to express themselves clearly, an incapacity to control or even comprehend their situations and actions, and a vulnerability which belies a certain sensitivity. But unlike Kowalski, Terry Malloy would be permitted to grow and change. Kowalski's bestial drives mixed with brute strength would give way, under persistent moral preachings, to Malloy's survival instincts tempered with human indecisiveness.

Kazan's successful Group Theatre experiences, his fleeting glance at radical politics, his personal rise from immigrant boy to Broadway's "gray-haired" wonder, and his early Hollywood popularity (*A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, 1945; *Boomerang* and *Gentleman's Agreement*, both 1947) led him to believe in the value of his own work and in the real possibility of reform. But Kazan stopped short of naive idealism. When confronted with large, historical forces, the individual becomes a victim who may, despite a heroic character, flinch and recoil, as did Emiliano Zapata when offered the reins of the Mexican government (*Viva, Zapata!*, 1952). Thus, by the time Arthur Miller contacted Kazan about a waterfront film, the two Broadway collaborators had shared several artistic experiences, but Miller's clearly defined goods and evils, so evident in *All My Sons*, did not blend well with Kazan's admixture of optimism and moral ambivalence.

Despite this difference in perspective, the two authors collected Miller's completed script and headed west to seek financial backing. After feelers to Kazan's studio, Twentieth Century-Fox, proved unsuccessful, the two appealed to Harry Cohn, president of Columbia Pictures. Cohn, who showed interest in the project, contacted Roy Brewer, whose advice on labor affairs Cohn considered essential. Brewer headed several Hollywood unions and served on the Motion Picture Alliance for the Preservation of American Ideals, an organization of conservative filmmakers who fought communism in Hollywood by aiding the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC). He supplied union workers and projectionists for films he considered politically acceptable and made it impossible for filmmakers disdainful of HUAC to secure a crew in Hollywood.⁴ Cohn and Brewer suggested that the authors convert the water-

⁴ Robert Sklar, *Movie-Made America: A Cultural History of American Movies* (New York: Random House, 1975), 258–59.

front mobsters into communists. When Miller and Kazan refused, Brewer retorted that the creators were dishonest, immoral, and un-American.⁵ The power behind this hardline position must have seemed ominous to Kazan in 1952 when he received a subpoena from the House Committee on Un-American Activities to testify concerning his knowledge of communist activities in the 1930s.

According to Kazan, *On the Waterfront* was "partly affected" by his two appearances before the celebrated House Committee on January 14 and April 9, 1952. "I went through that thing," he later admitted, "and it was painful and difficult and not the thing I'm proudest of in my life, but it's also not something I'm ashamed of."⁶ No doubt, Kazan confronted his unfortunate role as friendly witness with the perspective that he was trapped between two opposing and irreconcilable forces of evil, neither of which deserved his allegiance. However, he also must have seen that the federal government and the strong pro-HUAC sentiment lodged in Hollywood could destroy his career. The general "good" he perceived in the exposure and criticism of the American Communist Party's activities could be easily fused with the individual "good" of his personal success. "It is my obligation as a citizen," he told the committee, "to tell everything."⁷ Like "golden boy" Joe Bonaparte, Willy Loman, and even Blanche DuBois, Kazan saw himself as another victim of social and political forces which corrupt even the most honorable intentions.

With the committee as audience, Kazan read a carefully prepared statement which contained three clearly framed sections. First, he admitted and repudiated membership in the Communist Party. "I was a member of the Communist Party from some time in the summer of 1934 until the late winter or early spring of 1936, when I severed all connection with it permanently. . . . I had had enough anyway. I had had a taste of police-state living and I did not like it." Second, he explained the depth of his complicity by describing his mission and by listing people with whom he had worked.

For the approximately nineteen months of my membership, I was assigned to a "unit" composed of those party members who were, like myself, members of the Group Theatre acting company. . . . What we were asked to do was four-fold: 1) to "educate" ourselves in Marxist and party doctrine; 2) to help the party get a foothold in the Actors Equity Association; 3) to support various "front organizations" of the party; 4) to try to capture the Group Theatre and make it a Communist mouthpiece.

⁵ Miller, "The Year," 43.

⁶ Elia Kazan, interview, "Cinema Grand Illusions," *The Real Paper* (May 30, 1973), 24.

⁷ Elia Kazan, testimony, *Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, House of Representatives, 82d Cong., 2d sess., Apr. 10, 1952, 2408. All quotes in the following paragraph, 2408-13.

All the people Kazan named had previously been named, and thus he did not actually lengthen the HUAC list. But he gave legitimacy to the Committee's witch hunt, and—not insignificantly—insured his future employment in Hollywood.

In the third section of his dramatic presentation, Kazan defended his career since leaving the party and tried to show that his artistic activities were in no way un-American. "After I left the party in 1936 except for making a two-reel documentary film mentioned above in 1937 [*The People of the Cumberlands*], I was never active in any organization since listed as subversive." In characterizing his artistic efforts since 1936, Kazan described *Death of a Salesman* as a story which "shows the frustrations of the life of a salesman and contains implicit criticism of his materialistic standards"; he called *Viva, Zapata!* "an anti-communist picture." He labored to show how even the most critical works were essentially American in intent, purpose, and effect. Depicting himself as a staunch defender of democracy, Kazan asserted that concern for the social problems of the 1930s had drawn him to the Communist Party but that the Party's preoccupation with political subversion had actually harmed real social reform.⁸

Prior to his second appearance before the House committee, Kazan wrote a lengthy letter to the editor of *The Saturday Review*, defending the anti-communist message of *Viva, Zapata!* In explicating the democratic theory behind the film's action, Kazan described Zapata (played by Marlon Brando) as "no communist; he was that opposite phenomenon, a man of individual conscience."⁹ The true reformer was an individualist who fought for the same ends as did the Communist Party, but consulted his conscience rather than ideology when making political decisions. Kazan submitted his entire letter to the House committee as part of his formal statement. In the same issue of *The Saturday Review*, Norman Cousins delineated the essential differences between a communist and a liberal. "A Communist, although he pretends to be independent, always takes his order from above; a liberal makes up his own mind. A Communist, because he takes orders from above, is sometimes trapped by an overnight change in Party policy; a liberal can change his mind but he does so slowly, painfully, and by his own volition."¹⁰ Three days after

⁸ For a broader study of this point, see Daniel Aaron, *Writers on the Left* (New York: Avon, 1961, 1969), 388–407.

⁹ Elia Kazan, "Elia Kazan on *Zapata!*" *The Saturday Review* (Apr. 5, 1952), 22–23. For a longer study of *Viva, Zapata!*, see Paul J. Vanderwood, "An American Cold-Warrior: *Viva, Zapata!* (1952)," in John E. O'Connor and Martin R. Jackson, eds. *American History/American Film: Interpreting the American Image* (New York: Ungar, 1979), 183–201.

¹⁰ Norman Cousins, "Can an American Be Trusted?" *Saturday Review* (Apr. 5, 1952), 20.

testifying, Kazan purchased advertising space in the amusement section of *The New York Times*. In the two-column, page-long "Statement," Kazan defended his actions before the Committee and called upon other liberals to come forward. "Secrecy," he wrote, "serves the communists." In May 1952, Clifford Odets, whom Kazan had named as a former member of the Communist Party, appeared before the Committee and reiterated the emerging liberal theme. "One must pick one's way very carefully through the images of liberalism or leftism today," he told the subcommittee, "or one must remain silent."¹¹ Odets, Kazan, and others like them had evidently changed their minds "slowly, painfully and by [their] own volition" because they chose, as Terry Malloy would choose, not to remain silent.

Yielding to political hysteria on the right did not appeal to all liberals. Kazan's performance before the committee incensed his associate, Arthur Miller, and the two embarked on an artistic duel which lasted into the 1960s. Miller fired the first round with *The Crucible* (1953), an apparent study of witchcraft in Puritan Salem. According to Miller, "the witch-hunt was a perverse manifestation of the panic which set in among all classes when the balance began to turn [away from communal unity and] toward greater individual freedom."¹² Miller tried to link the Salem witch-hunts with Washington red-baiting. While hoping to avoid spurious connections between witchcraft and communism, he did seek to explore hysterical and oppressive responses to individual acts of conscience. Kazan's return volley in the artistic duel, *On the Waterfront*, made mobster control over the waterfront analogous to Communist Party control over the individual. But the film did not confuse communism *per se* with gangster racketeering; it sought to explore two forms of oppression. Miller and Kazan, the liberal duellists, were firing at each other by firing in opposite directions. Standing back to back, Kazan fired at the political left while Miller fired at the right.

Kazan's role as a "friendly witness" before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and Miller's efforts to capture the "witch-hunt" in dramatic form left undeveloped their ideas for a film on waterfront crime. After testifying, Kazan contacted author Budd Schulberg. Son of a famous Hollywood producer, B. P. Schulberg, the young writer had grown up surrounded by famous people and great wealth. After graduating from Dartmouth College, he returned to his hometown, wrote

¹¹ Clifford Odets, cited in Lately Thomas (pseud.), *When Even Angels Wept: A Story Without a Hero* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 175. Elia Kazan, "A Statement," *New York Times* (Apr. 12, 1952), 7.

¹² Arthur Miller, "The Crucible," in *Arthur Miller's Collected Plays* (New York: Viking, 1957), 228.

extra dialogue for various studios, and released his first novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (1941). This searing critique of money-hungry executives in the film industry not only singed the coats of all capitalists, it also avenged his father's premature ouster from Paramount Studios. His second novel, *The Harder They Fall* (1947), updated and expanded Odets' *Golden Boy*, detailing the moral failings of comfortable and dependent employees of a corrupt boxing syndicate. Schulberg followed this cynical blast at complacent self-interest with *The Disenchanted* (1950), a partially autobiographical novel which simultaneously traced the demise of Manley Halliday (known to be F. Scott Fitzgerald) during the filming of *Love in Ice* (Walter Wanger's *Winter Carnival*) and the slow disenchantment of a fresh, young screenwriter (Shep/Schulberg) with 1930s socialist thought.¹³

In each of these novels, Schulberg created a powerful character whose success depended upon pitiable humans who cowered before the very force that exploited them. While exploring the curious dynamics of a social structure which propelled the most vicious hoodlums to the top, the three works recorded the slow and agonizing incapacitation of a lone victim struggling to maintain dignity in a hostile environment. From his first novel, which condemned ambitious Hollywood capitalists, to his third, which followed the demise of an "artist" in Hollywood's film factory, Schulberg sketched a debased and graceless society which protected and rewarded the powerful for trouncing upon the weak.

Shortly after his third novel appeared on the market, Schulberg's attention was diverted to the New York waterfront. In 1949, Joseph Curtis, an aspiring film producer with Hollywood connections, had founded Monticello Film Corporation for the sole purpose of converting to celluloid Malcolm Johnson's *New York Sun* articles on union corruption. In 1950, the articles, which won Johnson a Pulitzer Prize, appeared in book form. With this popular momentum, Curtis convinced Robert Siodmak to direct the film and asked Schulberg to write the script. Despite his original hesitancy to return to an industry he had lacerated mercilessly in his fiction, Schulberg agreed. Measuring the distance between successful people and social rebels, Schulberg explained his fascination with the film's subject matter. "The epic scale of the corruption and violence intrigued me. Only a few blocks from Sardi's and Shor's and other places where itinerant social philosophers assemble to discuss the problems of the day, guys who said 'no' to industrial-feudalism were getting clobbered

¹³ Budd Schulberg, *What Makes Sammy Run?* (New York: Random House, 1941); *The Harder They Fall* (New York: Random House, 1947); *The Disenchanted* (New York: Random House, 1950).

and killed.”¹⁴ Invigorated by the importance and scale of the project, Schulberg investigated, planned, and finished *Crime on the Waterfront* by the spring of 1951, but due to grievous errors in the financial planning, the script was languishing in production limbo when the House Committee on Un-American Activities summoned the author to Washington.

As a disillusioned ex-member of the Communist Party, Schulberg chose to obey the subpoena. Testifying on May 23, 1951, he admitted Party membership, explained Party methods of controlling dissident writer-members, and named former associates. He argued that the limited choices available to the 1930s reformer matched with the urgent need to do something made Party membership seem reasonable. “I joined,” he told the committee, “because at the time I felt that the political issues that they seemed to be in favor of, mostly I recall the opposition to the Nazi and Mussolini and a feeling that something should be done about it, those things attracted me, and there were some others, too.”¹⁵ He separated offenders into those who joined the Party to advance basically humanitarian causes and those who wished to manipulate the humanists to advance totalitarian ends. Ideological fanatics within the Party exploited socially credible writers who sought to study society’s ills. Irritated over the Party’s attempts to regulate his own writing, Schulberg left the organization. In his testimony, he contended there were communists and innocent communist dupes, and the “innocents” were really solid democrats fighting for legitimate causes.

In 1952, with the Curtis project still in financial trouble, the rights to *Crime on the Waterfront* reverted to Schulberg. Shortly thereafter, Kazan, who was interested in making a film on corrupt judicial processes in an eastern city, contacted Schulberg. Because they had both been involved in aborted film projects concerned with waterfront crime, they quickly agreed to develop a realistic story based on mobster control of longshore unions. Drawing upon personal investigations, two previously completed scripts, and Johnson’s *Crime on the Labor Front*, the two collaborators familiarized themselves with the details of waterfront conditions.¹⁶

From 1946 to 1951, the docks in New York and New Jersey were rampant with illegal activities. Attempts at reform, as demonstrated by the ill-fated effort of Peter Panto, proved fruitless. After a wildcat strike in

¹⁴ Budd Schulberg, “Waterfront: From Docks to Film,” *New York Times* (July 11, 1954), II, 5. Also, “Suit Seeks Profits of *On the Waterfront*,” *New York Times* (Oct. 19, 1954), 24.

¹⁵ Budd Schulberg, testimony, *Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, House of Representatives, 82d Cong., 1st sess., May 31, 1951, 583–84.

¹⁶ Malcolm Johnson, *Crime on the Labor Front* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1950). For a broader view of waterfront crime, see Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (New York: Free Press, 1960, 1962), 197–205.

1945 focused national attention on the waterfront, William F. Warren, the workers' popular leader, reportedly "fell and hurt himself" on the job, and before reappearing on the docks, made a public "confession" that he had been "a dupe" of the Communist Party. In 1948, a second major strike reached its peak soon after the New York Anti-Crime Commission subpoenaed mobster John M. Dunn, who while awaiting execution in prison promised to name the man known as "Mr. Big"—called "Mr. Upstairs" in the film. While most workers assumed "Mr. Big" to be financier millionaire William "Big Bill" McCormick, dockworker speculation thought New York City's Mayor, William O'Dwyer, better suited the description. But Dunn reneged on his threat, the strike was settled with force, the Anti-Crime Commission recessed, and Mayor O'Dwyer ran for reelection.

By November 1952, when Kazan and Schulberg started writing their story, the New Jersey harbor, the specific location for the film, was the setting of frequent assaults, firebombings, beatings, and mobster activities. With the year coming to a close, the New York State Crime Commission (the Commission in the film) made known its findings. With a sweep of media sensationalism, the Commission charged the obvious: the docks were battlefields for entrenched corruption. Workers were forced to take extortionary loans for guaranteed work, and illegal strikes were called to extract larger fees from shippers. Union leaders abused elections, bookkeeping practices, and pension systems; and shippers, to insure against loss, remained silent. Drawing upon this vast cityscape of corruption, Kazan and Schulberg ran through eight different scripts, each of which exposed illegal activities on the New York waterfront while providing the authors an opportunity to explain their position on analogous contemporary events of seemingly greater national significance.

The themes which emanated from Kazan's and Schulberg's HUAC testimonies—the beguiled innocent manipulated for unwholesome purposes; individual responsibility to the democratic whole; preference for individual morality over ideological fanaticism—were literary in nature and religious in tone, and they helped the authors shape the raw material of waterfront crime. Likewise, the testimonial ceremony, which included confessing anti-social activities, identifying associates and theories responsible for those misguided endeavors, and recommending more desirable ways of expressing social concern, suggested dramatic form. The three stages of their testimony became the three major steps of Terry Malloy's conversion. The first segment of the film exposes Malloy's associations with the corrupt gang; a second segment depicts his discovery of corruption as well as the depths of his own guilt; the final segment shows him battling for his own "rights."

Each segment has a ritualized scene which summarizes the action. The “shape-up” scene discloses the dehumanizing conditions fostered by union corruption. A union leader throws “brass checks” on the ground where longshoremen wrestle to retrieve their guarantee of one day’s work. Terry, shown separated from the central scramble, is given a “cushy” job as a reward for setting up Joey Doyle for “the knock-off.” A “martyrdom” scene in the middle of the film includes Father Barry’s oration over the dead body of “Kayo” Dugan. The “waterfront priest” pleads with the men to come forward and speak because silence only serves the mobsters. A “testimonial” scene at the Crime Commission hearings completes the trilogy. The legal institutions receive reinforcement, and Terry confesses to society his complicity. The state’s principal investigator thanks Terry profusely, explaining that his actions “have made it possible for decent people to work the docks again.” This speech echoes the one Representative Francis E. Walter addressed to Kazan after his HUAC appearance: “Mr. Kazan, we appreciate your cooperation with our committee. It is only through the assistance of people such as you that we have been able to make the progress that has been made in bringing the attention of the American people to the machinations of this Communist conspiracy for world domination.”¹⁷ In the film, confession and reassurance release Terry from his past transgression and enable him to reclaim his “rights.”

The first two ritual scenes—the shape-up and the martyrdom—were borrowed from Johnson’s *Crime on the Labor Front*. The prize-winning reporter for the *New York Sun* characterized the longshore working conditions “as not befitting the dignity of a human being,” a theme consistent with the testimonies and previous creations of both Schulberg and Kazan. The city’s district attorney claimed that the abject conditions on the docks were “a direct result of the shape-up system.”¹⁸ Johnson’s description of the typical dockside call for workers—the morning shape-up—was to fit neatly into the Kazan-Schulberg script:

The scene is any pier along New York’s waterfront. At a designated hour, the longshoremen gather in a semicircle at the entrance to the pier. They are the men who load and unload the ships. They are looking for jobs, and as they stand there in a semicircle their eyes are fastened on one man. He is the hiring stevedore, and he stands alone, surveying the waiting men. At this crucial moment he possesses the power of economic life or death over them, and the men know it. Their faces betray that knowledge in tense anxiety, eagerness and fear. They know that the hiring boss, a union man like themselves, can accept

¹⁷ Kazan testimony, *Hearings*, 2414.

¹⁸ Johnson, *Labor Front*, 137.

them or reject them at will. . . . Now the hiring boss moves among them, choosing the man he wants, passing over others. He nods or points to the favored ones or calls out their names, indicating that they are hired. For those accepted, relief and joy. The pinched faces of the others reflect bleak disappointment, despair. Still they linger. Others will wander off inconsolately to wait another chance.¹⁹

The potency of this scene in the film results from camera positioning. When Big Mac (played by James Westerfield) blows his whistle to call the workers, the camera stands behind him, permitting his large figure to obscure the huddled longshoremen. During the scramble for tags, the camera is low to the ground, capturing facial expressions; character movement is downward, and the camera seems to press the viewer against the dirty dockside surface. When Edie, who has come to the "shape-up" to study the causes of union corruption, tries to retrieve a tag for her father, she comes in contact with Terry Malloy. He overpowers her and recovers the contested tag for his friend, suggesting that muscle prevails on the docks. But when Terry learns that his female adversary is the sister of the kid whom he "set-up for the knock-off," his "conscience" convinces him to surrender the tag to her. Thus, the conflict between muscle and morality is established. During this encounter, the camera first frames Edie and Terry's contest in the foreground with the longshoremen's struggle in the background. When the scramble gives way to moral considerations, the camera changes position, isolating their conversation and making a special case within the generally demeaning environment. The moral "conscience" which Edie embodies alters the situation. For the scene as a whole, the camera presents the viewer with the facts of the story (a sense of viewing a "real" event in the workers' daily lives), the filmmakers' opinion about the story (Mac and his associates have the power; the workers are oppressed and unorganized), and Terry's special relationship to the depicted waterfront conditions. Through camera positioning, the scene establishes conflicts to be explored as the film progresses.

To Kazan and Schulberg, the discipline within the communist "unit" of the 1930s depended upon similar insults to personal dignity. "The typical Communist scene of crawling and apologizing and admitting the error of my ways,"²⁰ as Kazan described the practice, degraded human intelligence, and the film's "shape-up" scene was intended to capture such dehumanization. After Mac throws the last tags on the ground, exasperation leads to pushing, which eventually leads to chaos. In the film,

¹⁹ Ibid., 133-34.

²⁰ Kazan testimony, *Hearings*, 2410-11.

this central expository scene attempts to highlight the hopelessness and futility of longshoremen in a place "which ain't part of America."

Johnson's portrait of waterfront conditions also contained a model for the film's moral catalyst, Father Barry. As associate director of the St. Xavier School (Manhattan), Rev. John M. Corridan, the "waterfront priest," delivered sermons, held meetings, contributed advice to troubled longshoremen, and exhorted the dock workers to strike and rebel. On the violent New Jersey docks, where the film was actually shot, Corridan delivered a virulent attack on union corruption. His sermon, "A Catholic Looks at the Waterfront," was reproduced in Johnson's book:

You want to know what's wrong with the waterfront? It's love of a buck. . . . Christ also said "If you do it to the least of mine, you do it to me." Christ is in the shape-up. . . . He stands in the shape-up knowing that all won't get work and maybe He won't. . . . Some people think the Crucifixion took place only on Calvary. . . . What does Christ think of the man who picks up a longshoreman's brass check and takes 20 per cent interest at the end of the week? Christ goes to a union meeting . . . [and] sees a few with \$150 suits and diamond rings on their fingers.²¹

As his words make clear, Corridan applied the moral teachings of Christ to waterfront unionism, and this unadorned social gospel reinforced the dualism between brutality and innocence which had figured prominently in previous works by Kazan and Schulberg. Because of the familiar set of visual symbols attached to Christian mythology as well as the moral authority and political safety of such a conservative institution, the filmmakers expanded and made essential Father Barry's role in convincing Terry Malloy to testify (see Figure 2).

The filmmakers, both former members of the Communist Party, used Father Barry's funeral oration to air their rejuvenated ideology and to challenge silent liberals to speak out against past totalitarian activities. The emotional speech introduces the idea of shared guilt and encourages action to combat and defeat the mobsters. As the shrill accusations re-sound through the ship's hold, the forces of chaos (the "mugs" who throw cans and tomatoes) are silenced (Malloy punches Tillio on the chin). With the camera searching high overhead to find Friendly and Charley, it is obvious that the power relationships have not changed. But the men begin to realize that their silence only serves their oppressors.

While Father Barry speaks, the shadow of a cross-like form rises on the wall behind him. After the speech, Dugan's body ascends from the worker's hell (the lower depths of the ship) accompanied by Father Barry and

²¹ Johnson, *Labor Front*, 223.

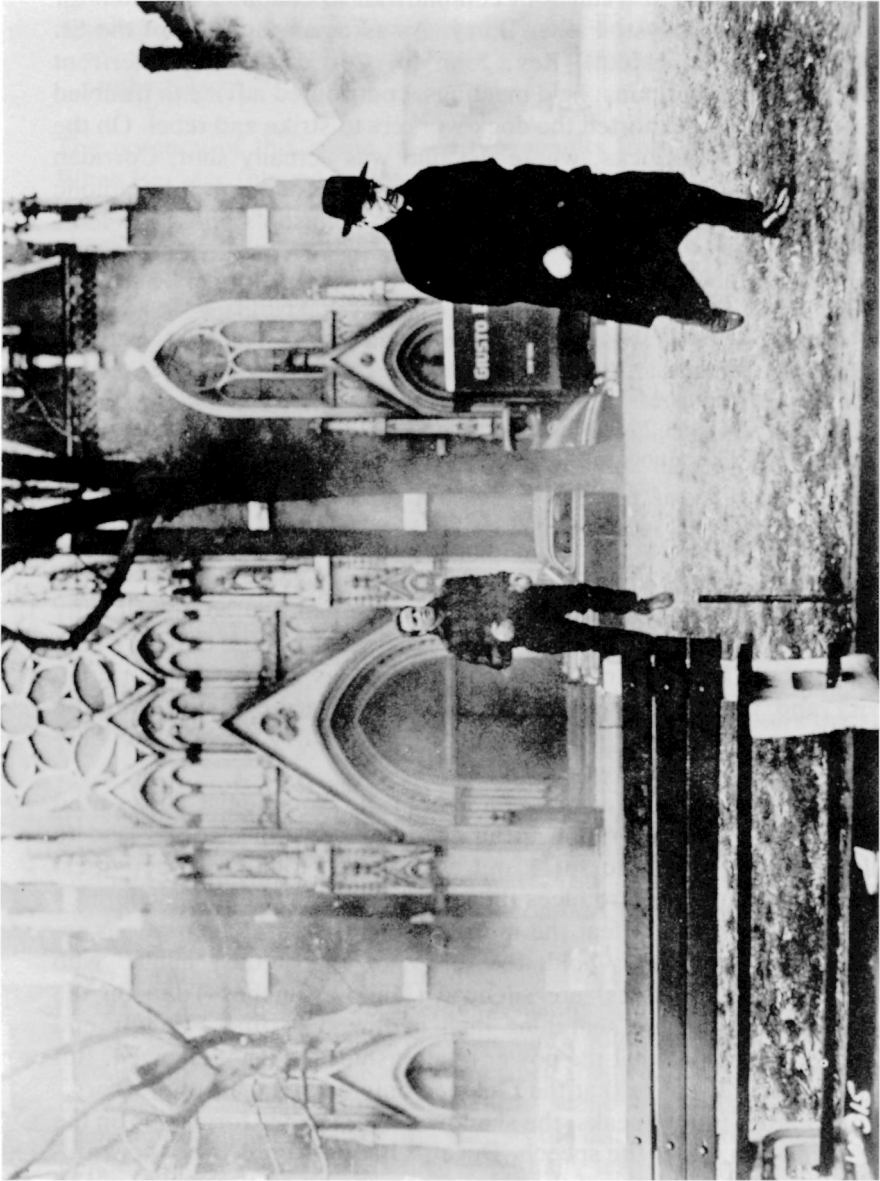


Figure 2. Terry Malloy, emerging from the church and the omnipresent fog, tries to catch Father Barry and make a private confession. Even though the "fog" never lifts completely, Terry's confession soon becomes public. (Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art/Film Stills Archive.)

Pops, two saintly escorts for the workingman's martyr. The men stand with their hats off, unified at least momentarily by this ritual. Whereas the shape-up belittled the workers, this affirmative scene "resurrects" their self-image. The action of the men at the shape-up was downward to the ground; here it is upward toward the sources of oppression.

A "testimonial" session with the Crime Commission, the third ritual scene in the film, completes the film's structural argument. Corruption and human indignity, exposed in the shape-up and then condemned over a martyr's body, are finally made public before a tribunal which seeks to punish those responsible. In the Commission hearing room, mobsters, newspapermen, commissioners, and interested citizens have a designated place in a physically ordered environment where legal processes are conducted in the open for all to see. Unlike the dreary alleys and dingy asylums of waterfront criminals, the brightly lighted and crowded room encourages photographers and reporters to publish what they hear. Investigators doggedly pursue the illegality hidden behind unions without accounting books and without elections. The degraded competition between workers in the shape-up has become a fair and open contest between equal adversaries made possible by a legal system which insures individual "rights." Totalitarian irreverence is supplanted by democratic dignity.

* * *

In the spring of 1953 with the script completed, Kazan and Schulberg went to California to seek studio backing. After several rejections, Twentieth Century-Fox purchased the rights, and then immediately released them. A foreign-born producer was staying in the hotel room across the hall from the anxious screenwriters, and casual conversation led to an agreement whereby Sam Spiegel assumed all production responsibilities for Horizon Pictures. Spiegel had arrived in Hollywood in 1938 and soon started producing minor films under the name S. P. Eagle. His unsteady career gained stability in 1947 when he and John Huston founded Horizon Pictures. Although Spiegel rarely intruded forcefully into a film's creation, he usually selected stories which concentrated on the dignity of human beings (e.g., *African Queen*, 1951). Thus, his decision to back *The Golden Warriors*, the film's new working title, was consistent with his other Hollywood investments.²²

²² Archer Winsten, "Reviewing Stand," *New York Post* (July 6, 1953), 22; James F. Fixx, "The Spiegel Touch," *Saturday Review* (Dec. 29, 1962), 13-14+; Thomas M. Pryor, "Spiegel and U.-I. Back Kazan Film," *New York Times* (June 13, 1953), included in Spiegel clipping file, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

Outside of financial support, Spiegel's contribution was limited to casting, which itself followed a circuitous route. Kazan evidently had Frank Sinatra in mind for both the Malloy and Father Barry parts, but Spiegel wanted to save the Malloy part for Montgomery Clift. Clift was unavailable and Sinatra reportedly demanded \$900,000, a sum far beyond the film's modest budget. Undecided, Kazan turned to his frequent associate, Marlon Brando, who signed a contract worth \$100,000. Kazan wanted Laurence Tierney for the Charles Malloy role, but Tierney was occupied, and so the part went to another member of Kazan and Strasberg's Actors Studio, Rod Steiger.²³

In June 1953, Lee J. Cobb, another Group Theatre graduate who had just finished acting in the New York City revival of *Golden Boy*, appeared before the House Committee on Un-American Activities and gave extensive testimony concerning Party operations. In his statement, Cobb struck a special theme which matched the developing ideas for *The Golden Warriors*: "I would like to thank you for the privilege of setting the record straight, not only for whatever subjective relief it affords me, but if belatedly this information can be of any value in the further strengthening of our Government and its efforts at home as well as abroad, it will serve in some small way to mitigate against whatever feeling of guilt I may have for having waited this long."²⁴ The theme of guilt and confession, implicit in the Schulberg and Kazan testimonies, was now explicit, and it merged easily with the waterfront story. In the film with the neo-gothic church hovering behind him, Terry confesses his culpability in Joey's murder to Father Barry; prodded by the priest, he next confesses to Edie Doyle as they wander outside the metal fence which encircles the waterfront community like the wire cage enclosing Terry's pigeons. But these private confessions give Terry little satisfaction, and the priest reminds him that confession before a public tribunal will better serve his "brothers." Thus Cobb's indirect suggestion that dispensation for social transgressions can be granted only by the institutions abused blended smoothly with the motivations Father Barry was to implant in Terry's mind. Shortly after his Washington appearance, Cobb joined the film project.

Eva Marie Saint had appeared on television for two and one-half years in *One Man's Family*. A member of the Actors Studio, she had her Broadway debut in 1953 opposite Lillian Gish. Kazan and Spiegel saw her perform and sent Anna Hill Johnstone, Kazan's costume designer, to see

²³ Sidney Skolsky, "Hollywood is My Beat," *New York Post* (Aug. 26, 1954), 29.

²⁴ Lee J. Cobb, testimony, *Hearings Before the Committee on Un-American Activities*, House of Representatives, 83d Cong., 1st sess., June 2, 1953, 2356.

the show. Johnstone agreed with their choice, and Saint was hired. Other characters were cast with considerably less confusion. Karl Malden, because of previous work with Kazan and the Group Theatre, was hired as Father Barry, and Tony Galento and Tami Mauriella were hired as Friendly's thugs because of their careers in the boxing world which Schulberg knew so well.²⁵

After their successful collaboration on *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Kazan selected Richard Day as the new film's art director. Spanning more than thirty years in Hollywood, Day's distinguished career included six Academy Awards.²⁶ As supervising art director at Twentieth Century-Fox and later as a freelance set designer, his creations always captured a sense of psychological as well as physical condition. The result of his involvement in the dockside environment, *On the Waterfront* became an urban drama depicting the American city as threatening and confining. Closed spaces, dark caverns, alleyways with lights piercing open spaces and blinding the viewer, laundry hanging on clothes lines creating diagonal intrusions into the human space, underground passages which swallow automobiles and entrap unsuspecting people, and a foggy dankness which oppresses human emotions and obscures perceptions—these are the visuals which menacingly accompany Terry Malloy's futile attempt to assess his situation.

Day's carefully selected sites for location shooting in Hoboken, New Jersey, injected physical power into the dockside cityscape. The riverside piers, with Manhattan looming like a foreign country beyond the long-shoremen's reach, as well as the enclosed apartments and barroom, reinforced the general theme of corruption and degradation. These physical settings were complemented beautifully by the photography of Boris Kaufman, whom Kazan hired based upon documentarist Willard Van Dyke's recommendation.²⁷ Kaufman was the younger brother of Dziga-Vertov and Mikhail Kaufman, both of the Soviet Kino-Pravda film group. During Boris Kaufman's early days in the Soviet film industry, he learned the photographic trade from his brothers. In 1928, he left the Soviet Union with his parents and soon collaborated with Jean Vigo on *À Propos de Nice* (1930), *Zéro de Conduite* (1932), and *L'Atlante* (1934). Arriving in the United States in 1942, Kaufman began his American career as a documentarist for the United States government and eventually as a free-

²⁵ George Lait, "Eva Marie Saint," *Columbia Pictures Publicity Release* (Feb. 1954), n.p.; "Waterfront Film Dramatizes the Real," *Business Week* (Aug. 7, 1954), 94-98.

²⁶ "Obituary," *Variety* (May 31, 1972), 68; also, several unpaginated clippings are in the Richard Day file, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center: *Variety* (Aug. 20, 1952) and *New York-World Telegram* (Dec. 29, 1937).

²⁷ Skolsky, "Hollywood"; Kazan and Van Dyke were both members of Frontier Films.

lance cinematographer in New York City. From these early experiences he developed his style. He preferred black and white to color because mood and overall conception or "idea" could be more directly communicated. He liked early morning and late afternoon shooting because light sources naturally modeled three-dimensional objects and because soft shadows on dimly lit objects could exploit the black and white hues in the film stock. Finally, he preferred clear days for distant shots because aerial perspective could naturally affect and smoothen hard edges. For human, close-up work, Kaufman waited for cloudy days when diffused light better exposed facial features.²⁸

Kaufman believed that image and theme should be united and that cinematographers should be concerned primarily with visual continuity from scene to scene. These interests affected his work for *On the Waterfront*. Since the film was shot in story sequence, Kaufman's greatest worry involved constancy in lighting. To solve this nagging problem, which was compounded by New York City winter weather, he burned trash fires in the area while shooting. The result was an evenly diffused light, although the film contains a few mismatched takes which do break the continuity. This simple solution to a technical problem added meaning to the *mise-en-scene* and helped coordinate atmosphere with character development. Due to a pressing shooting schedule, many shots, including the entire final scene, were taken at night. To insure visual continuity, Kaufman complemented the artificial lighting with a sprayed mist, which helped disperse the concentrated light.²⁹ Blurred lines defining closed spaces and an incessant fog obscuring open vistas visualized correctly the moral confusion which the characters exhibited in words and actions.

Kaufman's work matched Day's dingy sets, and the tight spaces and cramped camera angles offer immediate clues to the theme of ambivalence. The closeness of the objects and characters suggests intimacy, as when Terry and Edie actually communicate within a crowded frame at close range (on the roof, in the saloon, in the corner of her apartment). But tight shots and cramped compositions also suggest entrapment (inside the birdcage, the Friendly bar pay-off scene, the ship's hold, Edie's terrified face as she hears Terry's confession). Open spaces with distant views appear only on the rooftop, suggesting a romantic image of impossible or at best temporary escape from the streets and work below.

²⁸ Christopher Baffer, "From Poland with Love: Tribute to Boris Kaufman," *Backstage* (Nov. 12, 1976), 30. For Dziga-Vertov and the Kino Eye, see Richard Meran Barsam, *Nonfiction Film: A Critical History* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1973). Also, Jay Leyda, *Kino: A History of the Russian and Soviet Films* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1960).

²⁹ Edouard L. de Laurot and Jonas Mekas, "An Interview with Boris Kaufman," *Film Culture*, 1 (Summer 1955), 4-6.

Other elements of the film help frame social and moral ambivalence as the central theme of *On the Waterfront*. Speaking about his HUAC testimony, Kazan confided: "I don't think there is anything in my life towards which I have more ambivalence." He compared himself to his filmic counterpart: "Terry Malloy felt as I did. He felt ashamed and proud of himself at the same time. He wavered between the two. . . . He felt like a fool, but proud of himself. . . . That kind of ambivalence."³⁰ Terry's actions do reveal ambivalent feelings. Attracted and repulsed by "cops" and "crime investigators," Malloy reluctantly moves away from the vulgarity of the boxing-mobster world and toward the respectability of established institutions. The mobsters have derailed Terry's boxing career, leaving him nothing but vague memories of fights he should have won, but he continues to aid their efforts to frighten and control the frustrated longshoremen; in so doing, he remains "a bum." The situation comes into focus when Charley offers Terry a foreman's job in return for silence and support at the Crime Commission hearings. Acknowledging his indecisiveness, Terry blames his brother for not protecting him from the city's "hawks." He leaves, trying to resolve the conflict between attachment to his brother, a mobster, and to his laboring "brothers," whose lives are dominated by the mob. Charley also faces dual allegiances, but his criminal past is beyond redemption. When he tries to convince Friendly that his younger brother just needs time to free himself from the preachments of Father Barry and Edie, Friendly, reflecting Arthur Miller's world of clear choices, gives Charley his options: "You can have it his way or you can have it your way, but you can't have it both ways. . . . On your way 'deep thinker.'" Charley chooses to break with mobster dogma and acts out of personal concern for his brother; having acted out of "conscience," he is eliminated.

In a morally expedient world, actions often militate against personal feelings, creating ambivalent reactions. As Terry and Edie stroll through a neighborhood park, they talk cautiously, wanting both to stay together and to separate. He feels guilty because of Joey's murder and is worried she will discover his crime; she is repelled by Terry's friends but wants to talk to him. According to Kazan, the glove which Edie drops and Terry retrieves offers them the needed excuse to remain together.³¹ The social environment pulls them apart, but their feelings bring them together with the help of a personal object. Terry tries on her glove, almost as if he were about to "try out" her moral values. He had worn boxing gloves for the mobsters, and he will now try to fit into the white glove of virtue. After he has

³⁰ Kazan, cited in Ciment, *Kazan*, 110.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

Edie's glove on his hand, he comments jokingly about her childish appearance. He acknowledges that she has grown from an ugly kid with braces and braids to an attractive woman. However, his physical features have remained the same, and he seemingly confronts adult responsibility and even sexuality with ambivalent feelings. As they stand next to the park's cage-like fence, he reminds her how the Catholic sisters tried "to beat an education" into him, and she comments that human understanding would have worked better. Later, outside the constricting fence, Edie wears the same white gloves and listens painfully as Terry confesses his role in Joey's murder. The extra-tight close-up of her horrified expression and the blaring dockside noises emphasize Edie's shocked reaction to the ugly truth. As in *Golden Boy* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the physical and the spiritual are at odds.

When Terry and Edie confront each other in her apartment, ambivalent feelings surface again. The Richard Day set is white, mindful of Edie's association with virtue, but the walls are badly discolored. Blond-haired Edie in her white slip cowers in the corner below a crucifix. When Terry knocks, she primps her hair, moves toward the door, and then shouts, "Go away"; the actions and the words contradict each other. Terry, disregarding the words, breaks down the door; she retreats, making assertions about his responsibility. Shaking in rage, he yells to her to stop talking about "conscience; that's all I've been hearing about." He then insists, "You love me, Edie," pleading in a manner quite different than his door-breaking act would suggest. Reemphasizing the split between actions and feelings, she responds: "I didn't say I didn't love you. I said leave me alone." Throughout the scene, she retreats deeper into her apartment, and he follows, finally forcing her into a corner and into a passionate and contorted embrace. Unlike Stanley Kowalski's rape of Blanche DuBois, the effect of this mannerist fusion of bodies is to join opposing forces. Violence and love, brutality and tenderness, the physical and the spiritual are finally brought together. Edie and Terry have forsaken their antithetical extremes and moved to a middle ground where moral decisions are left to the individual.

The final artist brought into the collaborative effort, composer Leonard Bernstein, received the finished print in the spring of 1954. As a student at Harvard University, Bernstein had studied with Walter Piston, but after graduating he undertook advanced study with Aaron Copland, an American composer who found film work satisfying. Between concert performances, Bernstein had penned the music for two Broadway musicals and a modern ballet piece for Jerome Robbins called "Fancy Free" (1944). Repeatedly cited as a communist dupe by the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Bernstein never suffered from the publicity, and his

career continued its steady rise through the 1950s. Confronted with the opportunity to write a film score, Bernstein at first balked, thinking the finished piece would be submerged beneath actors' voices and on-location noises. But the visual power of the film overwhelmed his resistance, and he joined the collaborative effort. "I was swept by my enthusiasm," he later wrote, "into accepting the writing of the score . . . although I had thereto resisted all such offers on the grounds that it is a musically unsatisfactory experience for a composer to write a score whose chief merit ought to be its unobtrusiveness. . . . But I heard music as I watched; that was enough."³²

Because Bernstein composed the music after the actual filming had been completed and because he did not know personally any of the other collaborators, the score for *On the Waterfront* can be studied not only as an essential part of the film but as commentary on the story as well. Schulberg wanted harmonica music to emanate from instruments played within the camera's eye, thereby controlling the composer's freedom to weave dramatic complexity into the material of verbal and visual images. Kazan wanted music which would unobtrusively support the lines spoken by specific characters, thereby avoiding generalizations drawn from musical allusions. Both seemed interested in music which would not challenge the primacy of their ideas. The score which Bernstein delivered to them complemented the film's theme of ambivalence and even made clearer certain aspects of character development.

Bernstein screened the film over 50 times, selecting and timing scenes which seemed to need music, and created a highly consistent, thematic score. Rhythmic flourishes and haunting melodic passages enliven the story's development and add nuance and density to each character's actions. Interestingly enough, the final score's thematic lines, instrumentation, extended *crescendi*, and dissonance resemble techniques Aaron Copland used in his score for *The Quiet City*, the ill-fated Irwin Shaw play which Kazan directed for the Group Theatre in 1939.³³ The major slow themes in the Bernstein score are the "Waterfront Theme" (which opens the film, appears in segments throughout, and reappears in altered form during the final scene) and the "Edie/Love Theme" (which announces

³² Leonard Bernstein, "Notes Struck at 'Upper Dubbing,' California," *New York Times* (May 30, 1954), II, 5. For score analysis, see Hans Keller, "On the Waterfront," *The Score and I. M. A. Magazine* (June 1955), 81-84, and William Hamilton, "On the Waterfront," *Film Music*, 14 (Sept.-Oct. 1954), 3-15.

³³ Harold Clurman, *The Fervent Years: The Story of the Group Theatre and the Thirties* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 80. A concert piece of the Copland score is available: Aaron Copland, "Quiet City," *Four American Landscapes*, Everest 3118; Bernstein also salvaged a concert suite from his film score: Leonard Bernstein, *Bernstein Conducts*, Columbia Masterworks, MS 6251.

Edie's entrances onto the waterfront stage). The two themes are played together during the "dead pigeons" scene on the roof, offering a musical "reprise" of the mannerist kiss which had momentarily united Terry and Edie—and the values they represent. After the kiss, Charley's body is discovered; after these two melodies appear intertwined, Terry confronts Johnny Friendly and gains personal revenge for his brother's murder. Thus, Bernstein's score attributes motivation to Terry's actions. Without such commentative musical statements, the causal connections between characters' thoughts and actions might be missed.

Aggressive and assertive themes etch an acoustic portrait of the corrupted, urban environment. The "Murder Theme," marked *presto barbaro* in the sheet music, is first heard as the Friendly gang emerges from its dingy waterfront shack. The percussive three-voice fugato with its rhythmic irregularity, creates an unsettling atmosphere and hauntingly presages Joey Doyle's murder. Bernstein wanted the "Murder Theme" played before each of the three murders, thus creating a formal allusion to the tripartite plot structure, but the music was cut from the sequence preceding Dugan's murder. During a tense dubbing session, Bernstein's position was overruled because Kazan and Schulberg thought the street sounds and muted dialogue of location shooting were more important.³⁴ A dirge-like version of the murder theme, however, does accompany Dugan's rise out of the ship's hold.

Each of the three major themes is attached to one of the contending factions of the waterfront story. The violent and corrupt mobsters are identified with the murder theme; the spiritual and incorruptible Edie is associated with the love theme; and the environment in which these two antithetical forces collide is represented by the waterfront theme.

Atmospheric unity, like that gained from Kaufman's misty photography and Day's dismal sets, is communicated in the music through a fourth, independent "Snap Theme." Even though this agitated passage is the most pervasive musical theme in the film, it is not used for literal commentary on characters or plot. At the opening of the film, the "Snap Theme" is interwoven with the "Murder Theme" during Joey Doyle's murder, but it soon disappears leaving the more aggressive theme predominant. This unique combination of melody and rhythm is heard again in Edie's apartment just prior to the kiss and again during the attack on the basement church meeting; later it is given a honky-tonk rendering for the saloon scene. After Terry discovers his brother's dead body, the "Snap Theme" replaces the "Murder Theme" as Terry goes to "take it out on their skulls." The theme is played rapidly during the fight scene between Terry and Johnny Friendly with a slower rendition heard after the fight

³⁴ Bernstein, "Upper Dubbing."

when Terry's body is discovered lying half in the water. A complex metric pattern—5/4 and 6/8 combined—animates the "Snap Theme," and the ascending and descending eighth note pattern gives the theme an active, disturbing sound. This added musical touch accents the dramatic peaks in the story and contributes to the film's overall aesthetic unity.

* * *

Contributions of the various collaborators are synthesized in the final scene of *On the Waterfront*. The Kaufman camera continues to frame a blurred image of the waterfront site with special attention to the dingy floating shack where hoodlums bet on horses and dispense with human lives. Longshoremen line the pier overlooking Friendly's headquarters; angry but unmoved they resemble an immense Greek frieze of noble figures incapable of action. The dockside fog, the burning trash cans, and the cold air which quickly converts each breath into mist all conspire, as the environment has throughout the film, to constrain longshoreman rage and to blur the connection between power and oppression. In such a setting, only personal rebellion is possible. When Pop casts the evil Johnny Friendly into the hellish water below, the act balances his son's fall from the rooftop at the outset of the film. But Pop's conversion to social rebel will require more than a single spontaneous act. Here Terry Malloy must act alone rather than as a proletarian hero, because—like Norman Cousins' liberal—Terry has changed his mind "slowly, painfully, and by his own volition."

But even Terry's conversion seems incomplete. Early in the story, Edie visits Terry on the roof. As she looks down on the "original golden warrior" and his loyal retinue, the camera catches her standing next to a rough-hewn, rooftop antenna. The intersecting lines of the wooden structure form an identifiable cross, which visually foreshadows Father Barry's eulogy to Dugan. During a later visit to the roof, Edie brings Joey's jacket to Terry. Unlike Edie's glove which symbolically allowed Terry to "try on" a new morality, Joey's jacket brings with it a heavy responsibility; Joey testified and Dugan testified. Each owner of the jacket was forced to subordinate self-interest to a higher social good. "There's more to this than I thought, Charley," Terry finally admits to his brother. With Edie and her cross intruding into Terry's barren world and with Father Barry peppering the reluctant crusader with visions of a better world, Terry, like an anti-Faust, is being dragged—kicking and screaming—out of hell into heaven.

In the final scene, these visual and verbal references come into play. As Terry staggers to the warehouse door to meet the awaiting gray-haired man, he carries the longshoreman's hook, a suggestion of the cross Christ

carried as well as the burden placed on the shoulders of longshoremen. Terry wears a sacred cloth, the coat worn by previous martyrs. He is bleeding about the head, a visual allusion to the crown of thorns, and is enervated from the beating (flagellation) he has just received. Edie, who has by now fused the contradictory roles of lover and saint, tries to help Terry, but is restrained by Father Barry, who urges Malloy forward to his duty. He leads the longshoremen—the rejuvenated flock—to work while the scarred and evil figure of Johnny Friendly remains outside the closing doors.

Kazan has insisted that the final scene is not utopian: “I never meant that when they go back to work at the end of the film there isn’t going to be that same corruption starting up a month later.”³⁵ But with the dockside Gates of Heaven mercifully enclosing the laboring faithful and casting out the malevolent oppressor, Kazan’s anti-utopian comment seems inappropriate. Actually, the Christian symbolism deceives the casual viewer. For one moment, individual revenge and Christian brotherhood seem united; but undoubtedly they will separate again.

An accurate reading of this scene requires attention to film language. In the final walk, camera point of view shifts abruptly from omniscient to first-person; looking through Terry’s battered eyes, we see the blurred and unstable perspective he has on the goal being sought. This is not the first time subjective camera has been employed; it appears earlier in the film after a truck nearly kills Terry and Edie. From Terry’s viewpoint, we see Charley’s limp body hanging from a partially-lighted alley wall. A slow zoom to Charley’s face helps the audience anticipate Terry’s emotional response. Thus, in the final scene when the first person camera returns, the audience should recognize that Terry is motivated more by vengeance than by altruism. The film’s structural argument, an admixture of ideas borrowed from Johnson’s book and HUAC testimony, exposes demeaning labor conditions, explains the reason for these conditions, and suggests a legal solution. After the structural argument ends with the Crime Commission testimony, the film changes perspectives, permitting Terry, like John Proctor in *The Crucible*, to demand his self-respect. From the social perspective, which included clear moral choices, the point of view shifts to the participant’s perspective, where outlines are less clear. All the Christian imagery points to a better world, but Malloy’s perceptions suggest otherwise.

The facts of the longshoreman struggle prove that little substantially changed after this fleeting victory. “Mr. Upstairs,” the man who appeared in the photograph which Terry smashed prior to testifying, and who flicked off the television set just as Terry named the corrupt officials,

³⁵ Kazan, cited in “Grand Illusions,” 24.

remained in power. As mentioned earlier, the film's "Mr. Upstairs" could have been financier "Big Bill" McCormick, but it also could have been ILA president Joseph P. Ryan, who still held power when the film was released. Nonetheless, his actual identity remained with mobster John Dunn who died in the electric chair. Regardless of his name, some central figure still dominated the lives of longshore workers, and Johnny Friendly correctly boasts: "I'll be back." As the warehouse door closes behind the victorious workers in the last shots of *On the Waterfront*, the image of caged pigeons should return to the viewer's mind. The warehouse symbolizes both protection and entrapment. The workers, having for the moment regained control of their union, must face the problem which originally brought unions into existence: how can the laborer maintain autonomy and dignity in a capitalist society? To Kazan and Schulberg the problem was similar for the modern liberal whose situation they made analogous to the film's labor rebel: how can liberals eradicate the social problems which the Communist Party exploited? With its ambivalent ending, the film suggests that the challenges require constant vigilance. The structural argument blamed corrupt individuals for the failure of a workable institutional structure; the ambivalent ending with its suggestion of continued corruption posited the idea that oppression is inherent in the institutional system. The two positions—the viability of liberal institutions and ambivalence toward individual action—contradict each other. Thus, the film is a curious mixture of assertions favoring social reform and suggestions as to the futility of such reforms.

The musical score accentuates the tenuous nature of a reformer's victory. Avoiding a strong, tonic cadence, Bernstein's closing musical passages, which are derived from the "waterfront theme," are riddled with dissonance (fourths and flatted ninths), rhythmic snaps (sixteenth-note attacks from one-half step below the sustained note), and moving intervals which are severed quickly with hard accents. The final note of the score is not a sustained tonic which would imply a stable resolution. Instead, the last note is a staccato, accented eighth note marked quadruple *forte*, and spread over a chord which is saturated with half-step dissonance. The visuals, the music, and the dialogue tell of temporary victories, fragile successes which will again be threatened by corruption. These cinematic elements accurately reflect the historical situation. Even the sanguine Rev. John Corridan commented that "the arrest, prosecution and conviction of a few waterfront criminals will improve the situation on the docks only temporarily."³⁶

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³⁶ Corridan, cited in Johnson, *Labor Front*, 227.

Interest in and disagreement over *On the Waterfront* started shortly after its release in July 1954. *The Saturday Review* predictably called it "one of the most exciting films ever made in the United States," but *Harper's Magazine*, slightly more critical of certain liberal positions, described it as "a safely sterilized and hygienic slumming expedition," explaining that the story was "false to the longshoremen whose lot it purports to depict, false to the dedicated individuals who have tried to improve that lot, and ultimately false to itself." *The New York Times*, after pointing out that valuable background material was missing, went ahead to call the film "the most violent, graphic and technically brilliant job of movie-making to be unveiled this year." *The Morning Telegram* (New York) characterized the drama as a "rough, tough baby with the simple passions of mankind stripped bare." *Commonweal* said the film was a "simplification of the waterfront mess," but allowed that "the final scenes have the quality of making a saint." *Time* insisted the film maintained "the old sentimental prejudice that ordinary people are wonderful no matter what they do." *Life* magazine accurately reflected the dichotomy of critical reactions by explaining that *On the Waterfront* "is the most brutal movie of the year, but it also contains the year's tenderest love scenes." Perhaps to confuse further the connection between historical event and fictional presentation, Anthony (Tony Mike) de Vincenzo, whose life inspired the character of Terry Malloy, sued Columbia Pictures and Sam Spiegel for \$1,000,000 for invading his right to privacy. He won a smaller settlement, as did Frank Sinatra who sued the same people for \$500,000, a sum he said had been promised him when he was offered the part. From Chicago to San Francisco, local longshore unions, both corrupt and honest, sued the film's backers for libelous assaults on the honor of longshoremen.³⁷

While critical and legal controversy surrounded the film, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences made its position clear. *On the Waterfront* received Oscars for Best Production, Best Screenplay, Best Direction, Best Actor, Best Supporting Actress, Art Direction, Black and White Photography, and Editing (Gene Milford). The New York Film Critics showed similar approval by awarding the film their three best awards: Best Movie, Best Director, and Best Actor. Even the most disparaging critic (*Harpers*) conceded the film "was beautifully acted, beautifully directed and beautifully photographed."

³⁷ *Saturday Review* (July 24, 1954), 25; *Harper's Magazine* (Aug. 1954), 93-95; *New York Times* (Aug. 1, 1954), 18; *Morning Telegram* (Sept. 6, 1954), 2; *Commonweal* (Aug. 20, 1954), 485-86; *Time* (Aug. 9, 1954), 82; *Life* (July 19, 1954), 45-46; "Sinatra Sues 'Waterfront,'" *New York Times* (Dec. 22, 1954), 54; "Union Sues 'Waterfront,'" *New York Times* (Mar. 18, 1955) in *On the Waterfront* folder, New York Public Library, Lincoln Center.

The theme of ambivalence in *On the Waterfront*, especially with its partially obscured purpose of personal aggrandizement, elicited blistering critiques from some writers. An exasperated Lindsay Anderson blasted the film's final scene as "implicitly (if unconsciously) Fascist." In an article which seemed to plead for populist melodrama, Anderson complained about the "horrid vulgarity" of the story and the "deep human falsity and demagogic dishonesty of argument." He was most disturbed that the ignorant and befuddled longshoremen transferred loyalties so easily from one oppressor (Johnny Friendly) to another potential oppressor (Terry Malloy) without experiencing some "sense of liberation." They seemed to accept fascist control as their condition in life. Aroused and confused over the ambivalent message, Anderson insisted that the final scene could be taken in only "two ways: as hopelessly, savagely ironic; or as fundamentally contemptuous, pretending to idealism but in reality without either grace, or joy, or love."³⁸

Anderson noticed correctly that the actual conditions which created the oppressive "system" were missing: how did the rackets become so effective; with whom did the racketeers deal; how did they come to power? Although answers to such queries were sprinkled throughout the film, detailed descriptions of social causes, usually the most compelling feature of realist drama, were curiously lacking. Even Budd Schulberg acknowledged this omission: "After years of prowling the New York waterfront, roaming the West Side and Jersey bars across from the docks, drinking beer with longshore families in the kitchens of their \$26.50 per month railroad flats, and talking to harbor union leaders, waterfront priests, and Irish and Italian rank-and-file 'insoigents,' our film *On the Waterfront* left me with an irresistible conviction that there was still far more to say than could be included in my screenplay." Anderson attributed the film's superficiality to director Kazan, but Schulberg adduced technical reasons. Not an indifference to the subject, but "the tyrant, the ninety-minute feature film" was to blame. "The Film is an art of high points," Schulberg explained, "I think of it as embracing five or six sequences, each one mounting to a climax that rushes the action onward. . . . A successful film must go from a significant episode to more significant episode in a constantly mounting pattern." What weakened the film's description of waterfront corruption was attention to the individual, moral struggles of Terry Malloy. "The film's concentration on a single dominating character brought close to the camera's eye made it aesthetically inconvenient—if

³⁸ Lindsay Anderson, "The Last Sequence of *On the Waterfront*," *Sight and Sound*, 24 (Jan.-Mar. 1955), 127-30.

not impossible—to set Terry's story in its social and historical perspective."³⁹

As if responding to Anderson's criticism Schulberg wrote a novel, *Waterfront* (1955), which made much clearer the problems and attitudes of New York's longshoremen. The essential difference between *On the Waterfront* and Schulberg's novel is the difference between conceptualization and dramatization. In *Waterfront*, the shipping company, under the direction of an ex-German army officer, Captain Schlegel, is made culpable along with the mobsters for longshore oppression; the mobster connection to the mayor's office is made explicit, and police complicity becomes obvious; the church hierarchy shows concern over losing large contributions from wealthy backers whose lives are negatively affected by Father Barry's investigations; the pigeon metaphor is greatly expanded, making their slaughter at the book's end a much more significant event; Peter Panto, the murdered longshoreman who inspired Arthur Miller's waterfront script, is mentioned, and like Panto, Runty Nolan ("Kayo" Dugan in the film) is dumped in the river. Most important, the rebellion reaches beyond one character, as several longshoremen testify at the hearings and wildcat union meetings attract more dissidents as the movement gathers momentum. But ultimately, Terry's heroic actions bring little change, and the mob isolates the troublemaker from the workers and then drowns him in the river. Even though the background material which Lindsay Anderson demanded figures prominently in the novel, the desired "sense of liberation" never materializes. The nuns accept Katie (Edie in the film) back into the fold, church officials reassert control over Father Barry, the Friendly gang silences Terry Malloy, the Golden Warriors murder the defenseless pigeons, and Johnny Friendly continues to run his operation from jail after receiving a mild scolding from his boss. As apathy and anger intermingle, calming the beleaguered docks, Father Barry and Katie contemplate "the way evil often intertwines itself with good, and the way life had of rubbing some of the quality of one on to the other." Ambivalence still blurs the distinctions between right and wrong, denying rebellion the clearly-defined cause upon which revolutionary zeal depends. In such an environment, progress, as Father Barry resolves, is not measured in "hundred yard dashes, but in mere centimeters, painfully crawling forward."⁴⁰

In the past decade, comments about *On the Waterfront* have continued to vary as widely as they did when the film first reached the public.

³⁹ Budd Schulberg, "Why Write It When You Can't Sell It to the Pictures?" *Saturday Review* (Sept. 3, 1955), 5-6.

⁴⁰ Budd Schulberg, *Waterfront* (London: W. and J. MacKay, 1955, 1956).

Placing the film in an existentialist mold, John M. Smith explained that "the real force of the film's ending is the ending of self-pity and the assertion of the fundamental importance of effort." Andrew Dowdy commented that the waterfront exposé represented "a covert reply to contempt for the informer." Renee Penington, narrowing the focus of the film, described it as a public expression of Kazan's "agony" over informing on his former Communist Party associates. Peter Biskind, attempting to stem the rising tide of pro-Kazan criticism, analyzed the film in terms of power, suggesting that the physical bullies (mobsters) were replaced by moral bullies (Edie and Father Barry). Neil Hurley found *On the Waterfront* to be boldly revolutionary in illustrating the process of "conscientization," the psychological path which leads a rebel to revolution. Hurley thought the politically-charged story was "one of the greatest social realism films to emerge from Hollywood." In a similar tone, Laurence Kardish called "this stark, uncompromising and often brutal film . . . one of the high points of the decade."⁴¹ The variety of material included in the waterfront story—organized crime, Communist Party membership, House Committee testimony, political corruption—engendered conflicting responses depending on which element of the film most rankled or delighted the viewer. But more directly, the parallel arguments—the sanctity of liberal institutions and the ambivalence of human actions—invited, indeed encouraged, controversy.

While comments about the original work continue to reflect different perspectives on society as well as on the film, the waterfront story itself continues to resurface in different forms. In 1972, Budd Schulberg returned to the boxing world of *The Harder They Fall* and wrote *Loser and Still Champion: Muhammad Ali*. The sentiment expressed in that title reached the screen indirectly when the film *Rocky* (1976), which borrowed liberally from *On the Waterfront*, swept the country. Even though the film satirized Muhammad Ali, depicting him as a droll and foolish "golden boy," the duality between materialism and love was revived. Instead of corrupt mobsters, Rocky had to survive a beating from purely greedy capitalists. In the spring of 1977, Muhammad Ali himself was reported negotiating with Columbia Pictures for a remake of *On the Waterfront* with Ali as Terry Malloy.⁴² Although nothing developed after the initial

⁴¹ John M. Smith, "Three Liberal Films," *Movie* (Winter, 1971–1972), 21; Andrew Dowdy, *The Films of the Fifties: The American State of Mind* (New York: William Morrow, 1973, 1975), 39; Renee Penington, "The Agony of Kazan's Informer," *The Thousand Eyes Magazine* (Jan. 1976), 8; Peter Biskind, "The Politics of Power in *On the Waterfront*," *Film Quarterly*, 29 (Fall, 1975), 25–38; Neil Hurley, *The Reel Revolution: A Film Primer on Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 59; Laurence Kardish, *Reel Plastic Magic: A History of Films and Filmmaking in America* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1972), 208.

⁴² "Ali's Revenge," *New York Post* (Mar. 1, 1977), 6.

contacts, it is interesting to note the difference between Kazan, who submitted to government pressure in part to protect his career, and Ali, who resisted government claims and nearly had his career destroyed. Clearly, the conflict between authority and individual conscience remains alive. Moreover, resistance to government control of quite another sort has also shaped the life of Michael Clemente, boss of I.L.A. Local 968 (called both Michael J. Skelly and Johnny Friendly in *On the Waterfront*). On March 6, 1979, the 71-year-old Clemente and another member of the Vito Genovese "family" were indicted on charges of attempting "to corruptly control and influence the waterfront industry in the Port of New York."⁴³ When the apparently defeated Johnny Friendly defiantly belated, "I'll be back," not even the most cautious director or screenwriter could have known the haunting accuracy of the boast, and no one could have predicted that the criminal's words would be heard around the docks twenty-five years later. As the film's ending suggested, the waterfront story is not yet over.

⁴³ Arnold H. Lubasch, "Five Indicted in Dock Inquiry; Two Linked to Crime 'Family,'" *New York Times* (Mar. 7, 1979), B1.