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FILM REVIEWS, BY F.A.J.

Now Terry Was a Wharfie....

ON THE WATERFRONT

(Columbia)

ON THE WATERFRONT is one of those films that turn up every now and then to shock us into remembering that the cinema has, after all, its great and moving triumphs. This film, which is one of them, might be compared with others like *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Death of a Salesman*, but because its story is simple and is told in an absolutely straightforward way, it should appeal to many who for one reason or another found those others "difficult." Very briefly, it's a story of corruption and racketeer control in an American waterfront union, and of how one man became involved, paused confused in his tracks, and fought back. It also tells a tender but unsentimental love story.

There are good reasons for comparing *On the Waterfront* with *A Streetcar Named Desire*, for this new film has two of *Streetcar's* principals — Marlon Brando and Karl Malden—and, perhaps even more important, the same director, Elia Kazan. As in the earlier film, Mr. Kazan sets his scene with economy—this time it's the waterfront with the union office, Brando as a watersider named Terry Malloy bawling a message to a figure at a tenement window, a man pushed from a rooftop, the cigar-chewing union bosses inside and outside a bar (terrific scenes, these), the victim's sister (Eva Marie Saint), and the priest (Karl Malden) among the group around the dead man. In about a minute and a half you've gripped the back of the seat in front, and you hang on there till the wharf-shed door drops behind the last longshoreman off to his job about an hour and a half later.

What are the ingredients that make *On the Waterfront* such as unforgettable picture? I've mentioned Mr. Kazan's strong and imaginative direction and he keeps right on at that high level all the way through. He has a first-class cameraman in Boris Kaufman, and they've both had good material to start with in a story and script by Budd Schulberg with dialogue of remarkable fidelity. The locations also would be hard to better: the waterfront itself, the tenements inside and out, the rooftop, looking out over the city where Terry and a couple of kids take care of the murdered man's pigeons—all give the film a haunting, real-life quality that suits the subject well. And, of course, there's the acting.

On his past form you wouldn't expect Brando to have much trouble with the tough in his portrayal of the ex-pug watersider; but leave that right aside and you still have a great and extremely moving performance—one wants to quote scene after scene—in his clumsy-tender love affair with the sister of the man he helped to kill. This is the more remarkable since so much of it is seen in close-up. In the difficult part of the girl Eva Marie Saint never falls below the highest standard—we will all look forward to her next film appearance; and as the priest who has carried his religion into the market place Mr. Malden embodies not only a fine, reckless courage but a warmly humorous aggressiveness in accepting the way of

BAROMETER

FINE: "On the Waterfront."
 FAIR: "Beat the Devil."

life of his new companions. Among others the best remembered are Rod Steiger as Terry's big bad brother (he has a hard job in the big scene with Brando), and Lee J. Cobb as the gang leader ("When I was 16 I had to beg for work in the hold").

On the Waterfront has its violent passages—a friend whose views I respect complains that it is too violent—but since its world is one in which men are afraid to complain when their right to life is denied by a gangster it would be surprising if it were otherwise. My own feeling is that considering its theme and setting the violence is neither excessive nor obtrusive. On the other hand its many moments of tenderness do stay in the mind, and it leaves us moved less by its brutality than by the ever astonishing resources of the human spirit.

BEAT THE DEVIL

(Romulus)

AFTER all that Lillian Ross and others have told us about John Huston it's not hard to imagine the high old times that were had by everyone when he was making *Beat the Devil*. For a start he and Truman Capote must have laughed themselves silly over the script, and my guess is that the atmosphere wasn't too depressingly gloomy when the unit and the wonderful cast got down to the job in Italy. The outcome is a stylish piece of clowning, amusing to look at and listen to, but not, I think, as funny as it probably seemed to everyone when it was being made—though I must say a great many people got a big laugh from it the night I saw it.

It all starts off when a very proper Englishman (Edward Underdown) and his wife (Jennifer Jones)—a girl more imaginative than truthful—meet another couple (Humphrey Bogart and Gina Lollobrigida), who are attached to a gang of crooks (Robert Morley, Peter Lorre, Ivor Barnard and Marco Tullio) bound for Africa and a packet of easy dough to be made out of uranium. After a certain amount of conspiratorial and romantic this and that they all get away on the same boat, are shipwrecked, captured by Arabs, and so on. Never for a moment are we allowed to take all this seriously. Yet Mr. Huston, with a cameraman (Oswald Morris) who either knows what he's doing or does what he's told, has used his considerable talent to put it on the screen with much skill and imagination; and he has got some fine performances from his remarkable cast. To illustrate: the shipboard scene with the sinister Mr. Barnard as a killer stalking Mr. Underdown on deck while a player piano tinkles in the saloon would in another context make your hair stand on end. In the event, of course, it doesn't; and, depending on the sort of things that amuse you and on the state of your liver, you could feel, here and elsewhere, that a great deal of talent has been rather extravagantly spent. You might be right, too. But, oh, to have been so much as a clapper-boy out there in Ravello when the thing was cooking!

N.Z. LISTENER, FEBRUARY 25, 1955.