

Promises, Trust, Betrayal: The Art of Elia Kazan

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Film director, playwright, and novelist Elia Kazan (1909-2003) led a storied, even legendary career. During his seven decades in public life he was much honored and much vilified, yet his work, particularly in film, has helped shape the stylistic, thematic, and ethical concerns of the genre. His work in the movies was in part driven by a group of ethical concerns that allowed him to explore a wide range of social issues without explicitly triggering his era's left-right ideological discourse. His films sidestepped this discourse while simultaneously drawing from it in order to pursue concerns that seem to have interested him as much, and perhaps even more, than the significance of the social problems he used as the basis for his movies. These concerns have to do with the ethical dimensions of promising, trusting, and betrayal. J. Hoberman has remarked that betrayal is a prominent theme in the movies Kazan made after his 1952 testimony before HUAC (House Un-American Activities Committee),¹ but betrayal was actually a thematic element from his earliest films, beginning with *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, his first feature, and they played a constitutive role throughout Kazan's career. Without theorizing about how these themes "developed" over his career, we can see they have been with him always, forming a kind of scaffolding on which he built his movies.

Kazan was born in Istanbul into an Anatolian Greek family that immigrated to the United States when he was four years old. He attended Montessori school and had Catholic catechism lessons, graduated from Williams College, and attended Yale Drama School before embarking on a career as an actor and was associated for several years with the Group Theater, founded by Harold Clurman, Cheryl Crawford, and Lee Strasburg. He eventually realized, however, that his

true calling was directing. During the 1940s, he became the nation's most famed director, including landmark works capped by Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and Arthur Miller's *The Death of a Salesman* (1948). He would work with Williams and Miller throughout his life. Many of the actors he worked were trained at the Actors Studio he founded in 1947 with Robert Lewis and Cheryl Crawford. Its artistic director was Lee Strassberg.

Kazan's stage work got the attention of Spyros Skouros, the studio head of 20th Century-Fox. This led to Kazan's directing *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1945) his first big feature-length picture. Some eighteen movies followed.² Among these are some of the most celebrated Hollywood films of the second half of the twentieth century.³ His later films, *The Arrangement* (1969), *The Visitors* (1972), and *The Last Tycoon* (1976), were generally less well received than those he made during the first twenty years as a movie director.⁴

Kazan directed many actors in some of their finest, sometimes breakthrough roles. These include Marlon Brando, Lee Remick, Karl Malden, Jack Palance, Eva Marie Saint, James Dean, and Kim Hunter. Some, like Brando, were catapulted to stardom based on performances Kazan directed. The performances he was able to get from these men and women are among the most transcendent in film. He showed this talent early, with Palance, in *Panic in the Streets*, a crime drama in which the actor plays Blackie, a small-time New Orleans hoodlum whose mistrustfulness and paranoia made him all the more frightening as he showed himself capable of killing over the smallest of stakes. Although Richard Widmark is often seen as the great film noir villain of the era for his role as Tommy Udo in *Kiss of Death* (1947), a film that's widely seen as a landmark in on-screen sadism, *Panic in the Streets*' Palance competes with him in ruthlessness, contrasting Udo's cruelty with his own deeply rooted suspiciousness.

With *Panic in the Streets*, other threads that run through Kazan's films can be seen. He was fond of presenting male leads with seemingly tough exteriors that harbored an internal vulnerability often driven by emotional complexes they seem barely to understand. We see suspicion and paranoia in *Panic in the Streets*, sexual inadequacy in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, a yearning for acceptance and love in *On the Waterfront* and *A Face in the Crowd*, and the drifting uncertainty of adolescence in *East of Eden*, the adult male's midlife crisis, and loss of direction in *The Arrangement*. These are all states of feeling that seem characteristic of a certain late twentieth century gendered social anxiety. Kazan pairs these with a mix of female characters

who, even at their seeming weakest, are elevated to the status of glorified mythic figures, at least when compared with their male counterparts. In *A Streetcar Named Desire*, Blanche DuBois (Vivien Leigh), although the creation of Tennessee Williams, is, in Kazan's hands, far closer to the goddess her suitor, Mitch (Karl Malden), initially sees in her rather than the whore Stanley believes her to be, let alone the weak sister Stella (Kim Hunter) imagines. or the mad woman led away in the film's final scenes. The long-suffering Marcia Jeffries (Patricia Neal), in *A Face in the Crowd*, serves first as amanuensis to the rise, then as chorus to the decline of the outsize, if overwrought "Lonesome" Rhodes (Andy Griffith). On the other hand, Carol Garth Baldwin (Lee Remick), in *Wild River*, only seems to be fragile and long-suffering. She turns out, much like Gwen (Faye Dunaway) in *The Arrangement*, to be far stronger than the man she loves.

Several of the roles Kazan directed featured male actors who became icons of the counterculture of the mid-twentieth century. Many were models for the young, alienated rebel that became prototypes of the late 1950s Beat and hipster archetype – part "white Negro,"⁵ part brooding juvenile delinquent, part hustler, part disaffected intellectual. These include: Brando's Kowalski (*A Streetcar Named Desire*) and his Terry Malloy (*On the Waterfront*); James Dean's Caleb Trask (*East of Eden*); Andy Griffith's "Lonesome" Rhodes, and Montgomery Clift's Chuck Glover (*Wild River*). Indeed, lines of dialogue from some of these figures – especially Brando ("I coulda been a contender," from *Waterfront*) have passed into the general language as counterculture-era popular culture clichés.

In addition to creating models for a mid-century cultural icon, Kazan, from the very beginning of his career, was concerned with elevating the portrayal of white ethnicities and nationalities on screen. *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* stands out, in part, for its humanist, non-stereotypical portrayal of Irish immigrants at a time when Irish immigrants were still portrayed as comic characters in American film, or as paragons of moral virtue. *Tree* has no priests or nuns who can serve moral approbation to the film's characters.⁶ The sentimentalism of the film is solely focused on the story's family drama, with the financial woes of the characters related in class, rather than ethnic, terms. *The Arrangement* also focuses, in part, on the family drama. The Greek-American Evangelos Arness, who has become the advertising executive Eddie Anderson, is in a fierce struggle with his immigrant father for paternal love. He is also in an equally fierce struggle with himself to find which identity (Arness-Anderson) he can finally live with; and what

makes the film so remarkable is that in the end we're not quite sure which, if either, of these identities is victorious. Perhaps Kazan's greatest contribution to this question is *America America*, a film that reverses the normative emigration story. Instead of focusing on the trials and tribulations of immigrants newly arrived in the country, Kazan focuses on the aspirations that drive people to migrate in the first place.

A major factor behind the quality of Kazan's characterizations is that he pioneered the adaption of Russian actor, director, and teacher Konstantin Stanislavski's "Method" style of acting to the screen. Kazan was a student of Group Theater founder Strasburg in the 1930s, and was a founder, in 1947, of the Actor's Studio, of which Strasberg became, in 1951, the artistic director. Strasberg's version of the "Method" trained actors through a series of exercises that focused on relaxation, concentration, sense, and emotional memory, with the aim, as Strasburg put it, of turning acting into "the process of living on the stage."⁷ Brando's performances in films like *Streetcar* and *Waterfront* are primary examples of "The Method" at work.⁸ Kazan's work with The Method also corresponded to his overall concern with realism in film. He was an early master of on-site filming, and his use of New Orleans in *Panic in the Streets*, the New Jersey docks in *Waterfront*, the Tennessee Valley in *Wild River*, and other location sites, helped set a modern standard for realism in the cinema.

If, as a director, Kazan was fond of character-driven cinematic realism, it was in the service of a political outlook that was, at best, paradoxical. While some of his films focus on working class characters, Kazan was by no means a Marxist; indeed, his relationships with Marxism, the Communist movement, and the political struggles of mid-twentieth century Hollywood are as much a part of his legacy as are his artistic accomplishments. During the middle 1930s he was briefly a member of the Communist Party, USA, but his sense of self-regard – what some might call his individualism – led him to recoil at the Party's demands, which he saw as an encroachment on his artistic freedom. Yet he remained part of Hollywood's leftwing milieu throughout the 1930s and 1940s, and even into the early years of the anti-Communist crusade against the Hollywood leftwing initiated by the HUAC in 1947. When Congressional investigators finally came for Kazan in early 1952, he at first testified at a closed session, where he talked freely about his own involvement with the Party and his differences, even disgust, at the Party and its policies.⁹ Although Kazan was a friendly witness, he was not

friendly enough for the anti-Communist press and the executives at Twentieth Century Fox, the company that produced his films. While Kazan says he willingly changed his mind and decided to testify publicly and identify people as Communists, he also records the pressures he was under to do so.¹⁰ Although the proceedings of his first, executive session were unknown to the public and would not be released for half a century, the record of the second, public session was known immediately.¹¹

His testimony was dramatic. In a prepared statement, Kazan named no fewer than twenty people, including eight of his former colleagues from the Group Theater; some were no longer Communists, some were deceased, while others were Party members and officials. His testimony marked Kazan for the rest of his career. The actual impact of the gesture was not without significance. His testimony led to the blacklisting of actors like Phoebe Brand, who was barred from films for four decades.¹² The symbolism of it was also significant, as his capitulation showed just how defeated the Hollywood Left – and the leftwing movement in the country generally – was by 1952. Many in Hollywood never forgave Kazan this transgression. The controversy was revived anew in 1999 when he received a Lifetime Achievement award from the Motion Picture Academy of Arts and Sciences. Scholars and others, including Kazan himself in his autobiography, have explored the issues behind Kazan's testimony in depth. It is useful to note that Hollywood was a part of the huge strike wave that occurred in the United States in 1946, a wave that was a crucial catalyst for the onslaught of the domestic Cold War and the repression that it entailed.¹³ The debate over whether, and to what extent, left wing directors, screenwriters, and actors shaped films according to their ideological proclivities is in some senses rendered moot by the rise of film noir and the growth of realism in film exemplified by Kazan's body of work.¹⁴ Here then, is one major paradox of Kazan's career. He played a major role in turning American cinema toward realism, both in characterization and setting, and to the extent that he chose to focus on stories that involved working class and middle class individuals in their struggles with larger social and psychological forces. To the degree that they pursued these objectives, Kazan's films were an extension of the leftwing politics of the 1930s and 1940s, as expressed not just by the Communist movement, but by the milieu of which it was a part, including broader social movements of the time. The terms "New Deal Liberalism" and "Popular Front" are often used to name this milieu, and the suppression of its organized left wing

in the 1950s did not completely eradicate from American life the influence and ideals this milieu produced.

One element that distinguishes Kazan's treatment of social issues, however, is that while not all of his films place a love interest at the center of the story, his most effective exploration of the themes of trust, promising, and betrayal all take place within the context of a love story. This was, to some extent, a studio-driven imperative. Yet it turns out to have been one element that enlivens social problem dramas like *On the Waterfront*, especially when compared to a drama like *Viva Zapata!*, a film that, for all its attempt to tell a great story, suffers from the absence of warmth that centering the ethical issues in a love interest could offer. Among the reasons for this is the way the exigencies of Cold War politics helped shape that film. Such exigencies militated against realism and historical accuracy, and it meant that placing a love story at the film's center was unimportant. In casting Brando in the title role as the early twentieth century Mexican revolutionary leader Emiliano Zapata, Kazan may have been acting in accord with Hollywood tradition, in which white actors routinely played Asian and Central and South American characters, but by the early 1950s this particular kind of racial masquerade was no longer required. More important, however, was Kazan's decision to portray the author of the *Plan de Ayala*, a significant land reform manifesto, as an illiterate. While Kazan does concern himself with the ethical questions of trust, betrayal and promising in *Viva Zapata*, the point of the film is the futility of revolution, and much of the tale's veracity depends on audiences accepting the portrayal of Zapata as a primitive.¹⁵ In this, it is not unlike Kazan's companion HUAC-era effort, *Man on a Tightrope*, a film that is his signal contribution to the anti-Communist melodrama genre of the 1950s. *Tightrope* is the story of a ramshackle Czech circus that, after facing multiple humiliations at the hands of the Communist police state, make a daring, if tragic (the film's lead character, Karel Cernik (Frederic March), dies in the attempt) escape from behind the Iron Curtain.

Both films deploy the figure of the stereotype, a feature that is not common in Kazan's canon. For example, *Viva Zapata!* and *Man on a Tightrope* each liberally offers us the anti-Communist stereotype of the Communist official.¹⁶ As Homi K. Bhabha notes, the stereotype is an ambivalent figure, one that is an alliance between two sets of discursive figures, "the metaphoric or masking function of the fetish and narcissistic object-choice," on the one hand,

and “the opposing alliance between the metonymic figuring of lack and the aggressive phase of the Imaginary.”¹⁷ Bhabha is here pointing to the idea that the stereotype is not a fixed object, but one that is, in a sense, a kind of clown. It is a figure whose mask both projects and embodies the fear the consumer of the stereotype sees reflected back to the self, while simultaneously serving as a sign of congenital deficiency that provokes aggression toward the sign – the stereotype – on the part of that consumer. The stereotype, continues Bhabha “is at once a substitute and a shadow.”¹⁸ It can never be the real thing, but because of the play of figures discussed above, it must resemble the Imaginary’s projection of what the real thing must be when displayed within the constraints of the discourse bounded by the stereotype. Kazan offers just this type of character in the Communist propaganda minister Fesker (Adolphe Menjou) in *Tightrope*, in the generic revolutionary Fernando Aguirre (Joseph Wiseman), in *Viva Zapata!*, and, to a significant extent Zapata himself. Suffice it to say that none of these characters resembles any of the Communists who are known to have been Kazan’s friends from the 1930s until he gave his HUAC testimony.

Pinky, Gentleman’s Agreement, Masquerades, and Trust

The concluding scenes of Kazan’s 1949 film, *Pinky*, are driven by a concern so banal and absurd, yet so exemplary of the contours of the peculiar social crisis it addresses, that it is odd that it has generated so little comment. The question at issue is the right of contract. *Pinky* tells the story of a black person who can pass for white. Pinky is a young woman (Jeanne Crain) who returns to her Southern childhood home after training up North to be a nurse. Despite some conflict with her grandmother, Dicey (Ethel Waters), Pinky accedes to Dicey’s request to care for an elderly white neighbor, Miss Em (Ethel Barrymore). The patient dies, but not before leaving her property to Pinky in her will. The film climaxes with a courtroom scene in which a judge has to decide whether Pinky has the right to have the will enforced.

At first telling, the story seems quite straightforward. A nurse cares for a patient and the patient dies, leaving her property to her nurse, and, by extension, to the nurse’s grandmother. The grandmother has worked for the patient as a domestic servant. The bond between them was such that the deceased cared for the pneumonia-ridden grandmother some years earlier. The will is naturally contested in court by an aggrieved relative, and the community sides with the relative. Indeed, no one, not even Pinky’s lawyer, Judge Walker (Basil Ruysdael), seems to believe she

will win her case. The story is told through the lens of the post-World War II racist southern United States and the social and legal regimes that prevailed there. Indeed, it was this frame that sold the picture, and enabled the story's most salient feature, the portrait of a black woman who has been passing for white, to become the one aspect of the tale that most resonated with audiences.

This has also remained the most controversial aspect of the film, primarily because of the casting of Crain, a white actress, in the title role. What Michael Rogin has called the film's "racial masquerade"¹⁹ has fascinated critics since it was first released. Indeed, the reception of *Pinky* has largely conformed to the era's vogue in films and other media that focused on racism, racial intermixture, and mulatto narratives. Although interracial romance was by no means a new theme in U.S. popular or literary culture, it seemed to emerge in the 1940s in a far more pronounced way than had been the case in previous decades. Interracial sex was big currency in films, novels, and popular culture that generated a sexualized excitement in the public. *Pinky* itself was adapted from one of these narratives, *Quality*, a 1946 novel by Cid Ricketts Summer. *Pinky* joined the vogue in interracial-themed literature that included popular novels such as *Go Down Moses* (1942) and *Intruder in the Dust* (1948) by William Faulkner; *Strange Fruit* (1944), by Lillian Smith; *The Foxes of Harrow* (1946) and *The Vixens* (1947) by Frank Yerby, and many others.²⁰ The film's illegal romance between Pinky and her fiancé, Dr. Tom Adams (William Lundigan) was given a legal cover due to the fact that audiences were aware that Pinky's African American identity was itself a fiction. As Elspeth Kydd argues, "*Pinky* relies for its effect on the simultaneous identification of white actress Jeanne Crain and black character Pinky. The play between the extra-textual knowledge of the whiteness of the actress and the diegetic necessity of the character's blackness is at the heart of the film."²¹ Crain, as a well-known white actress, had her "white" identity assured in the eyes of the movie-going public. Nevertheless, they knew that the romance between Pinky and Tom could not have taken place in the town where the film's action was set; and while much interracial romance in the popular narratives of the time were illicit ones, the status of Pinky and Tom's romance depended on Pinky continuing to live as a white person. The film, therefore, never genuinely questions the legal denial of the right of persons to marry interracially.²²

This aspect of the film has exasperated critics, beginning with Ralph Ellison, who dismissed the film as “the story of another suffering mulatto, and the suffering grows out of a confusion between race and love.” Ellison inexplicably refrains from commenting on the legal issues involved while dismissing the tensions regarding interracial romance that the film trades on by claiming that plenty of couples “manage to intermarry without violating their integrity, and indeed their marriage becomes the concrete expression of their integrity.” Ellison manages to avoid discussing the legality of such unions, in part because he seems to believe this part of the story, and the film’s other theme concerning contract, are trivial: “After sitting through a film concerned with interracial marriage, we see it suddenly become a courtroom battle over whether Negroes have the right to inherit property.”²³ Yet neither the right to intermarry nor the right to inherit property were rights held securely by the black population in the United States in the late 1940s. While intermarriage was illegal in thirty-one states at the end of World War II, the status of those laws was being challenged in the courts, especially in states outside the deep South. However, the ban remained strictly in force in the old Confederacy and would remain so until *Loving v. Virginia*, the 1967 Supreme Court decision that banned such laws altogether.²⁴ In addition, the Motion Picture Production Code in force at the time expressly prohibited the depiction of interracial romances and marriages in the movies. Given these constraints, it’s no wonder *Pinky* proceeded along the lines of a “masquerade” when telling the story of movie’s lovers. After *Pinky* wins her suit in court, she and Tom Adams part ways, as she decides to stay on in the South, reclaim her black racial identity once and for all, and use her inherited property to open a school for black children. The world of the story is saved from the specter of miscegenation, and so has the Southern regime of racial segregation.²⁵

Or has it? The final quarter of Kazan’s film is devoted to the story of that “courtroom battle over whether Negroes have the right to inherit property.” What is extraordinary is that from the moment Dr. Joe McGill (Griff Barnett), Miss Em’s doctor and executor, reveals the terms of the will, nobody believes its terms will be honored. Dr. McGill doubts that people in the town will accept the terms, which include the house and twenty acres of land. That evening, Dicey says to *Pinky*, “I’ve lived in this world a long time. Long enough to know for sure that if it’s something white folks don’t want you to have or something they want for they self, you might as well forget all about it.” The legitimacy of the will is questioned, not only by Miss Em’s racist, avaricious relative Melba Wooley (Evelyn Varden), but also by virtually everyone else as

well. Jake Walters (Frederick O'Neill), a kind of hustler trickster figure in the film, says that if he was a lawyer he would refuse to take her case. "I have a nice house and no fire insurance," he says.²⁶ After some wrangling, Pinky finally convinces the recalcitrant Judge Walker to take her case. Her victory is won against one of the fundamental rules of white supremacy in the South, as expressed by Dicey, the rule of "what white folks don't want you to have" or want for themselves. The history of white supremacy in the South is replete with stories of the denial of the right of inheritance, and indeed, so is the history of American literature, including African American literature. It is also a theme in more than one African American family story.²⁷

While the film's narrative supplies no direct warrant for such a supposition, it is not too farfetched to imagine the possibility of a blood relationship between Pinky and her benefactor. As several commenters on the film have noted, we are told nothing about Pinky's family background. Yet readers are cued throughout the film to the possibility of an unspoken narrative linking Pinky, Miss Em, and Dicey. Pinky partially grew up in Miss Em's house; Dicey and Miss Em are about the same age; Miss Em moved into Dicey's shack when nursing Dicey through a bout of pneumonia; both Dicey's and Miss Em's children are absent from the story; and finally, Miss Em offers Pinky an unusual amount of respect during some of their conversations. All these circumstantial conditions lend a particular salience to the notion that the film's emphasis on the right of inheritance, and on Pinky's victory in court, are indeed victories over white supremacy, if not victories over racist segregation as such. Indeed, reconceiving *Pinky* as a family romance shrouded in secrecy that its overt story only hints at, could go a long way toward remedying the sense of narrative incoherence that has troubled the film's critics, from Ellison onward.

Pinky wasn't the only one of Kazan's films of the late 1940s where the idea of "racial masquerade" was on display. *Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), also deals with questions of racial discrimination. In that film, the burden of the promissory obligation is articulated through Kathy Lacey (Dorothy McGuire), the love interest of the lead character, Philip Schuyler Green (Gregory Peck), a journalist who is writing an expose of anti-Semitism for a magazine published by John Minify (Albert Dekker) Lacey's uncle. At first Green is frustrated at his inability to get at the core of his story. He then hits on the idea that the way to get inside his topic would be to pose as a Jew, subjecting himself to the everyday bigotry against Jews that was still endemic throughout U.S. society in that era. Although it may be hard for some to believe now, the early

1940s is widely considered the high-water mark of anti-Semitism in the United States. Edward S. Shapiro describes the situation this way:

While Jews learned English and became citizens more rapidly than virtually any other immigrant group, this had not as of 1941 earned them full acceptance as Americans. Jews faced Jewish quotas in the elite universities, restricted job opportunities in fields such as engineering, insurance, and banking, quotas on the number of Jews accepted by the country's medical schools, and the firm opposition of American public opinion to modifying the country's immigration laws to admit additional numbers of Jewish refugees. Public opinion polls in 1938 and 1940 revealed that nearly two-thirds of Americans believed Jews as a group had "objectionable traits," and over fifty percent of Americans thought that German anti-Semitism stemmed either partially or wholly from the actions of the German Jews. Even the Wagner-Rogers bill, which would have admitted several thousand Jewish children from Germany, could not pass Congress in the late 1930s without crippling amendments.

This anti-Semitism escalated during the early 1940s. Employment opportunities for Jews remained limited, even in the defense industries. Approximately 30% of the employment advertisements in 1942 in the *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune* expressed a preference for Christians. Wartime public opinion polls revealed that Americans distrusted Jews more than any other European group with the exception of the Italians.²⁸

This atmosphere was rapidly changing during immediate postwar years, as groups like the Anti-Defamation League stepped up their campaigns. What's striking about *Gentleman's Agreement* is that, however groundbreaking it may have been, it was also riding a wave of changing public opinion, perhaps more a beneficiary of this wave rather than a shaper of it. This might explain the tenor of the film, and the way that questions of promissory obligation and trust play-out in it. Although the film seems mawkishly sentimental now, it was so highly regarded when it was made that it was nominated for eight Academy Awards, winning for Best Picture, and, for Kazan, the Best Director award as well. What makes it seem overly sentimental is exactly the "racial masquerade" that drove the film's action. Unlike the masquerade at the heart

of *Pinky*, that of *Gentleman's Agreement* seems almost archaic, and perhaps it is this that heightens the feelings of betrayal one feels each time Kathy reneges on her promise to keep Phil's secret or to honor his wishes with regard to his masquerade.

We can see how this all plays out by looking closely at three scenes in the film where the issues of trust and betrayal are put on display. The first is the dinner scene where Phil reveals to Kathy his plan to pretend to be Jewish in order to make himself a lightning rod for anti-Semitism. Kazan sets the scene as an intimate dinner for two lovers on the terrace of Kathy's apartment. Kathy and Phil are both elegantly dressed in black. The two lovers enter the terrace. We see the table is already set, as is the scene, apparently in a generic New York City neighborhood (the studio set gives us a bridge against the night sky that evokes the Brooklyn Bridge); the two lovers kiss before sitting down to talk. Kazan, here, has set us up for a romantic encounter, but we will be disappointed, as will the two lovers. Phil introduces his plan by telling Kathy, "I'm going to let everyone know that I'm Jewish, that's all." His tone, and the look on his face, is revealing, enthusiastic. The look on Kathy's face is at first open and welcoming. It soon darkens with alarm. "Jewish? But you're not, are you?" she responds. She attempts a quick recovery, but the damage is done. She at first focuses on how Phil introduced the subject, by saying: "I'll let everyone know, as if you hadn't before. So I just wondered. Not that it would make any difference to me." But it clearly does make a difference to her, as we soon find out. Meanwhile, Phil's face goes from puzzlement to disappointment, and while the camera shot is primarily a close up of Kathy talking, the brief shots back to Phil show his increasing annoyance and disappointment. Kathy becomes even more annoyed and distant when Phil asks her to promise to tell no one about the masquerade. The two are distant all through dinner and Phil, after a cold, nearly wordless parting, is standing at the elevator outside Kathy's apartment. He immediately regrets this turn of events, rings her doorbell again, and the lovers end their quarrel with a kiss.

A few scenes later, Phil and Kathy are returning to her apartment after a party hosted by Anne Dettrey (Celeste Holm) Phil's coworker at the magazine. (Holm won the 1948 Academy Award for best supporting actress in this film.) At the party, we meet Professor Lieberman (Sam Jaffe), a renowned physicist, who is proudly Jewish and treats us to a humorous discourse on Jewish identity and prejudice. On returning to her apartment, Phil learns that Kathy has broken

his trust once again, by telling her sister (and, by extension, her brother-in-law), of Phil's secret. She even asks Phil to forgo his pretense for the sake of a party being given by her sister. Phil is again disappointed that Kathy will not honor his secret. He leaves her apartment in a huff.

The third of these scenes is perhaps the most complex. This one takes place in Phil's apartment. Here they are dressed in everyday clothes (Phil in a light-colored suit, Kathy in a plain, but elegant dress, suggesting street-wear of the era.) Kathy is waiting for him and watching after his mother (Anne Revere) who is recovering from a minor stroke. Phil returns from being humiliated at the Flume Inn, which does not accept Jewish patrons, and is annoyed. (The Flume Inn scene is one of several anti-Semitic incidents that recur in this film.) Aside from his treatment at the Inn, he is wondering why Kathy hasn't offered Dave Goldman (John Garfield), Phil's childhood friend, who is Jewish and an Army veteran, her cottage place in Darien, Connecticut. Dave is up for a promotion that could bring him to New York, but is having difficulty finding a place big enough to justify moving his California-based family to the city. Kathy again begins to make excuses, first talking about how uncomfortable Dave would be with the prejudice in the community, but soon it is revealed that it is Kathy who would be uncomfortable at having to counter such bigotry. Here, incidentally, is where the meaning of the film's title is enunciated. Kathy begins to use the term to describe the kind of covenants and contracts that were widely used in the 1940s in the United States to ban whites from selling or renting properties to Jews and African Americans and they quarrel over Kathy's preference not to fight this prejudice.²⁹

In the middle of this argument, Phil's son, Tom (Dean Stockwell) enters, crying and a little ruffled. It turns out he's been in a fight, and the other boys hurled anti-Semitic epithets at him. Kathy grabs and hugs Tom. "Darling, it's not true," she says. "You're no more Jewish than I am. It's just a horrible mistake." This is the final betrayal, and triggers what looks like the final break between the lovers. (However, this is, after all, a Hollywood film, and we know the lovers will get back together, and indeed they do, after Kathy makes a gesture that enables Phil to forgive her.) For this part of the scene, Kathy is now dressed in a black overcoat, a wardrobe choice that, in this context, serves to heighten the severity of what she's about to say. After resorting, briefly, to a few bigoted accusations of her own, she tells Phil that she's glad she's Christian instead of Jewish, that this is nobody's fault, and that she can no more help being

happy about it than she can at being young, good-looking, rich, or healthy, instead of old, ugly, poor, or sick. “It’s just a practical fact, and not a judgment that I’m superior,” she says, before walking out the door and presumably out of Phil’s life.

In *Gentleman’s Agreement*, Kazan makes the conceit of Phil Green, the obviously Anglo Saxon journalist (Peck was of English, Irish, and Scottish ancestry) posing as Jewish as transparent a masquerade in its own way as was Jeanne Crain’s mulatto. On the other hand, as Kazan notes in his memoirs, reviewers and critics “repeatedly pointed out that here the word “Jew” was used for the first time in a major Hollywood film.³⁰ Nevertheless, no laws were broken or customs breached in the making of this picture, neither in the film’s own story world or in the real one. When Kathy begins to demand, at first subtly, then increasingly more overtly, that Phil modify his quest to keep his identity secret, she is setting herself up to betray that secret. The lover’s quarrels that ensue serve as a kind of secondary thread that allows us to see an underlying concern behind the overt theme of the movie. That concern is with the value of trust in human relations.

Knowledge, Decency, and Trust: *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*

At the heart of *Gentleman’s Agreement* and *Pinky* are the themes of trust, promises, and betrayal. These topics are fundamental to most of Kazan’s films, beginning with his first film *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, and continuing throughout his career. We can begin to create an ethical framework for Kazan’s work by developing a brief taxonomy of these ideas.

Studies of the concept of promising often begin with Aristotle, for whom the promissory obligation is not only a fundamental ethical duty; it is also the sign of an ethical person. Aristotle wrote:

Before we discuss each type of blameworthy person let us discuss the truthful person. Here we do not mean someone who is truthful in agreements and in matters of justice and injustice, since these concern a different virtue, but someone who is truthful both in what he says and in how he lives, when nothing about justice is at stake, simply because that is his state of character.

Someone with this character seems to be a decent person. For the lover of the truth who is truthful even when nothing is at stake will be keener to tell the truth when something is at stake, since he will avoid falsehood as shameful [when something is at stake] having already avoided it in itself [when nothing was at stake]. And this sort of person is praiseworthy

He inclines to tell less, rather than more, than the truth; for this appears more suitable, since excesses are oppressive.³¹

Although the people in Kazan's films often face ethical dilemmas with regard to truth-telling when issues of justice are at stake, Kazan is also concerned with the value of truth-telling when nothing about justice is at stake, when the issue at hand is simply one's own personal character and values. In *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, Johnny Nolan (James Dunn) is an alcoholic, full of life, but a faithless husband and father. Although he sometimes finds work as a singing waiter, he is mostly unemployed. He is full of tales, and of wild promises to his family. Nolan's son Neeley (Ted Donaldson) is a minor character, while most of the story's action revolves around Nolan's relationship with his wife Katie (Dorothy McGuire), who fights to balance her love for him with frustration at his fecklessness, and his adoring daughter Francie (Peggy Ann Garner). Nolan seems able to keep only one promise, that of helping Francie gain admission to a better school. While presented in ethically ambiguous terms (the family must forge an address for Francie to be eligible to attend the school), Johnny nevertheless keeps his promise to Francie that she would get to go to the school of her choice. Much of the film is a clichéd rendering of the consequences of alcoholism, but Kazan has drawn, in the figure of Johnny Nolan, a character whose truthfulness lies in the generosity he shows others, as we learn after he dies of pneumonia. We learn that his special gift was making others happy. After Johnny's funeral, Katie, who is pregnant, takes to her sickbed, and asks Francie to read one of the compositions she has written in school. Although she is reluctant at first, she begins to read from an essay called "The Man People Loved," the subject of which soon becomes apparent. He may have failed at making money, she reads, "but he had a gift for laughter, and for making people love him. He had the gift of making you feel proud of walking down the street with him. He had nothing to give but himself, but of this he gave generously." Whatever else audiences might surmise about the

character of Nolan, the main quality the film communicates is that his community believed he was a decent person.

The scene is complicated by the fact that the audience already knows Katie had stopped trusting her husband before he died. In an earlier scene, Katie responded with skepticism to Johnny's litany of promises to stop drinking, get a steady job, and assume his family responsibilities, a skepticism that is soon joined in by Johnny, as both realize that he will not be able to change. In Johnny's final scene in the film, Katie has just told him she's pregnant, and begins to talk about family finances, proposing that Francie drop out of school and start working in order to keep the family solvent. To Johnny's objections and renewed promises that he'll "do anything" so that Francie can stay in school long enough to graduate, Katie responds that "we can't count on that." Both know that Johnny cannot be trusted to fulfill this promise, and Johnny, in disappointment (and after a final scene with Francie), leaves the family's apartment to take a walk in a snowstorm, dressed only in a suit, scarf, and hat. Yet if Katie cannot trust Johnny to fulfill his promises regarding work, she does entrust him with being able to talk Francie into dropping out of school: "she listens to you," Katie says.

Zac Cogley offers some insight into the distinction between trusting, on the one hand, and entrusting, on the other. Thinking about this distinction can help us understand the way these questions unfold in the complex portrayals of these ethical questions in *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*. On the one hand, Katie can love Johnny and entrust him with certain tasks but not trust him; on the other, Francie's relationship with her father can be a nuanced one mixing love, trust, and a knowledge and acceptance of his weaknesses. As Cogley puts it:

[I]t is possible to entrust someone with the care of something, even yourself, for reasons that go beyond the reasons that ground trust. In this sense, entrusting is like acting (i.e., literally performing an action) and can be undertaken for all the familiar and myriad reasons that we act. (Think of the connotation of "entrusting," namely, handing something over to someone else.) Trust, on the other hand, is a more selective attitude. The considerations that support a well-grounded attitude of trust are a subset of the reasons that would support entrusting. It makes sense to attribute trust to someone only when that person

believes that the trustee will come through, not when she decides to take a gamble on the trustee's future behavior.³²

Katie entrusts Johnny to talk to Francie, and to look after her intellectual welfare – it is Johnny, after all, who has delivered on his promise to help Francie get into the school she wanted to attend – but she doesn't trust that he'll be able to support the family financially. Johnny knows he's lost her trust, and later on, after his death, we learn that he died trying to get a job and prove her wrong. Francie, on the other hand, is not yet old enough to care much about his lack of moneymaking ability, although she is fully aware of it. She shows this in the excerpt she reads from "The Man People Loved," – a composition that allows the audience to see why she was highly praised for her schoolwork – where Johnny's daughter talks about her father's weaknesses. "It is true that he had no gift for making money, but he had a gift for laughter, and for making people love him." In the sentence, a coordinating conjunction joins the first, negative clause to two positive ones. These positive clauses show that why everybody loved Johnny even if his wife did not trust him, and why Francie both loved and trusted him. Cogley offers the following definition of trust:

To trust someone is to believe that because a person will be directly and favorably moved toward us we can count on her good will and competence governing our interactions in a particular domain and (ii) to believe that we are entitled to her good will because we are a party to a normatively characterized relationship with that person.³³

Where nothing but good will is at stake, Johnny is loved by all, but where something "in a particular domain," the field of providing materially for the family, is concerned, he has lost his wife's trust. Katie is surprised to find that her husband was loved by all of those around him, perhaps because of her own mistrust.

Selfishness, Betrayal, and Censorship: *A Streetcar Named Desire*

One of the difficulties any observer has in assessing *A Streetcar Named Desire* concerns the narrative differences between Tennessee Williams's play and Kazan's film adaptation. The most important of these differences are the full story of Blanche's marriage and the film's ending. In the first case, film censorship in force at the time precluded any open discussion of

homosexuality, and thereby suppressed the story that Blanche's husband committed suicide after she found him with another man. We are also denied Williams's ending, which has Stella sobbing "with inhuman abandon"³⁴ while Stanley embraces her. As Kazan tells us in his autobiography, this scene, and some others, were alterations forced upon him, not just by the film studio's censorship office, but also by the Catholic Church hierarchy itself. Faced with a potential boycott from Catholic "decency" organizations, which held a powerful sway in the United States at that time, Twentieth Century Fox took the editing process out of Kazan's hands, and enforced cuts whose purpose was to "make the audience believe that Stella and Stanley will never again be happy together."³⁵

One aspect of the film that seems to have upset the Catholic hierarchy was that Kim Novak's Stella is a passionate, sensuous woman. She is freely sexual and emotionally available to Stanley while simultaneously appearing to maintain an inner psychological balance. In a word, she is "cool" and hot at the same time, a sensibility that would soon inform much broader cultural expressions, whether that of the Beat generation or the rock and roll generation that was beginning to surface at the very time this film was made. The passion that Novak's Stella exhibits (at one point she leaps on Stanley, arms and legs akimbo in what is clearly a sexual gesture) has an edginess that comes close to breaking the Motion Picture code, which expressly prohibited any openly sexual expression. Stella is powerful, self-contained woman who is both driven by her passions and self-aware of them. It is little wonder, then, that the Church-influenced film censors had to tell audiences that no woman who felt this way about a man, or about herself, could ever forgive his trespasses and be happy. Tennessee Williams had already broached this question in the last scenes of his play, but with an ambivalence that left Stella's essential qualities intact. This was not enough for the censors. The alternate ending given to the film is aimed at accomplishing the goal the censors had in mind.

The Church got its ending, but without really accomplishing its goal. After Blanche is driven away, Stella says to Stanley, "Don't you ever touch me again." These are the last words the couple exchanges with each other. Finally, Stella picks up the couple's newborn child, cradles it in her arms, and, after hearing Stanley call her, mutters, "I'm not going back. Not this time," before running upstairs to her neighbor Eunice's apartment. This dramatized breakdown of trust, made obvious by and for the Catholic censors, is present in that part of the film that is

loyal to Williams's version (and the version Kazan filmed before the censors touched it), as well. The ambivalence of the original ending is much more realistic, and speaks more directly to the ambivalence of trust, than does the censored ending; but to better understand why this might be the case, we should revisit how *Streetcar* treats the ethics of trust itself as an ambivalent category throughout its narrative.

In an early scene in *Streetcar*, we see the DuBois sisters, Blanche (Vivien Leigh) and Stella (Kim Novak), in a discussion. It is morning, and Stella is lying in bed. She and her husband, Stanley (Marlon Brando), have had a big fight the night before that ends in a passionate, sensuous embrace. Blanche is clearly frightened of Stanley, and is also frightened for her sister. Yet Stella is happy, and, as she does throughout most of the film, makes excuses for Stanley's bad behavior. At one point, in the middle of Blanche's entreaties that Stella must quit Stanley, Stella says: "You take it for granted that I am in something that I want to get out of." It soon becomes clear that Stella not only loves Stanley passionately, but trusts him as well. It is this trust that Stanley eventually breaks, potentially causing a rift between the couple. *Streetcar* is, visually, a strange film. Kazan directed the original play, by Tennessee Williams, on Broadway, and Williams wrote the screenplay.³⁶ Although most of the film, aside from the opening scenes, is filmed at an indoor soundstage (unlike *Panic in the Streets*, which, like *Streetcar*, was also set in New Orleans), the lighting gives the set an almost Gothic aura. The light in the daytime scenes is a pale white, while the nights are given the dim pallor of a not-too-well-lit district full of nightlife. It is meant to evoke the idea of the French Quarter as a scene of passion and mystery as it is the actual French Quarter of the city itself. (Cinematographer Harry Stradling, Jr., was nominated for an Academy Award for *Streetcar*, and, in 1964, would win one for *My Fair Lady*.)³⁷ The eerie atmosphere proves a perfect setting for the unfolding of the action and the stories of the four people at the center of the film: Stanley, Stella, Blanche, and Mitch. However, what the atmosphere particularly highlights is Stanley's character, whose boisterousness, sensuous, freewheeling personality, his occasional (above the waist) nudity, and his sweatiness, all prompt Blanche to describe him in primitivist terms. "He acts like an animal, has an animal's habits! Eats like one, moves like one, talks like one. There's even something sub-human, not quite at the stage of humanity yet," she says. The rest of this speech is full of the sort of primitivistic tropes one could expect to find in anti-black, racist literature.

This primitivism, along with Stanley being marked as an ethnic “other” (his Polish ancestry is mentioned several times in the film), also together marks him as a “white Negro,” in Mailer’s terms, that is, someone who “exists in the present, in that enormous present which is without past or future, memory or planned intention.”³⁸ It is precisely these characteristics that place his trustworthiness in question. We see that Stella loves him, but we are perennially unsure whether he is driven, to act in such a way that she can count on his “good will and competence.” We are moved to question his fundamental decency by his aggressive and taunting actions toward Blanche, who is clearly an emotionally fragile personality. Stella repeatedly implores Stanley to treat her sister kindly, to compliment her on her appearance, to take into account her emotional state. Stanley responds with selfishness, and when he hears that the DuBois family property has been lost, he becomes immediately suspicious of Blanche, thinking she must have cheated Stella (and by extension, him) out of the proceeds of a property sale. He is, by turns, inquisitive, angry, and sarcastic. Despite all this, Stella continues to believe, until the very end, that she is entitled to Stanley’s good will because, as Cogley would put it, she is “a party to a normatively characterized relationship” with him. The fact that she is married to Stanley and is about to give birth to the child they’ve conceived is the ground of her trust in him. Yet his actions have already informed the audience that he is unworthy of such trust.

What Kazan does with these narrative facts of Williams’s drama can best be seen in the characterizations he draws from Brando, Novak, and Leigh. Kazan’s Stanley is by turns aggressive and insecure, sensual yet mean. Although he is a married man who works in a factory and pursues adult recreational activities like bowling and playing poker, he is presented as being closer to a juvenile than a fully-grown man. Only once in the film do we see him dressed as an adult, in a sport jacket and clean, collared shirt (but no tie); otherwise he is dressed in a t-shirt and jeans, which, in the early 1950s, were generally figured either as work clothes or teenage wear. It is important to note just how transgressive Brando’s performance and costuming in *Streetcar* was for its time. Men of all classes went about the streets in suits and ties, and Kazan shows us this in one or two street scenes.³⁹ The director highlights this transgressiveness in a scene where Stanley is playing poker with three other men, one of whom is Mitch, who is introduced in this scene. Of the four men at the table, Mitch is the only one wearing a shirt with a tie. Of the other three men, one (Pablo Gonzalez, played by Nick Dennis, one of several whites who play Mexicans in this film), is wearing an A-shirt, a handkerchief around his neck, and a

hat, while the other player, Steve Hubbell (Rudy Bond) is wearing a t-shirt and hat. The two sisters enter in the middle of game, disrupting the proceedings. Up to this point, we are given to understand that the clothes the men wear at the poker table are their street clothes. (The effect is heightened by Mitch's shirt and tie.) Yet this illusion is shattered when Stella reaches for some garments on the bed and throws Pablo and Steve their shirts. Right after this, she turns around, facing away from Stanley, who hits her with one slap on her rear. Stella voices her objection before leaving the room. "It makes me so mad when he does that in front of people," she tells her sister.

Stanley is presented as a character that we like, perhaps warily, but do not trust. He finally betrays Blanche, Stella, and the audience by raping Blanche and causing the psychotic break that lands her in a psychiatric facility. In the scene just before Blanche is led away, Stella, in tears, tells Eunice, "I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley." She turns her back to the camera and is suddenly bathed in shadow. The shadow falls partially on Eunice, in close-up, who replies vehemently: "Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going." In neither version of the ending is it completely clear whether the couple will go on living together. That's because in neither version is the one major bond between them, their sexual attachment, shown to have been severed. In the film version, Stella's rejection of Stanley, while dramatic, is not wholly convincing. This can lead us to consider whether the second part of Cogley's definition of trust does not contain within it the seed of its own undoing. Cogley says that to trust someone "to believe that we are entitled to her good will because we are a party to a normatively characterized relationship with that person." What, however, is a "normatively characterized relationship"? In *Streetcar*, we can see two such relationships between Stanley and Stella, the marriage relationship and the carnal one, and the social values of established authorities, such as the Catholic censors, would claim primacy for the married relationship. However, the narrative of the film posits a tension between the two relationships, and holds out the possibility that the sexual relationship might take priority over the terms of trust normally found in the marriage relationship. In this situation, the ambivalence of the "normatively characterized relationship" becomes what is most important, and, it turns out, it is precisely that ambivalence that the censors of the film could not eradicate.

Promises, Legitimacy, and Betrayal: *On the Waterfront*

The categories of voluntary and involuntary action have long been held to be foundational concepts when thinking about the promissory obligation. One place we can see this most readily is in the Thomist philosophical and theological tradition. Aquinas points out that promises must be offered voluntarily, as something a person does *for* someone else. Since to “promise” to harm someone would, by definition, be a threat, to “promise” something that the other person could not accept is not, in fact, a promise. Promises cannot be made implicitly, but must be explicit, “by words or any other outward signs.” Witnesses to our promises are important, says Aquinas, to help us keep them, “not only through fear of God, but also through respect of men.” A promise, argues Aquinas, requires five things: deliberation, “purpose of the will,” the promise itself, the verbal utterance of the promise, and the presence of witnesses. Aquinas also points out that because “every sin is against God, and since no work is acceptable to God unless it be virtuous, it follows that nothing unlawful or indifferent, but only some act of virtue, should be the matter of a vow.” It follows, then, that since the act of promising is a virtue, one can also not “promise” to do evil.⁴⁰ Not only that, but the idea that promises are voluntary and cannot be elicited under coercion is a core part of Aquinas’s ideas on the strength of the promissory obligation:⁴¹

No man can firmly bind himself by a promise to do what is in another man’s power, but only to that which is entirely in his own power. Now whoever is subject to another, as to the matter wherein he is subject to him, it does not lie in his power to do as he will, but it depends on the will of the other. And therefore without the consent of his superior he cannot bind himself firmly by a vow in those matters wherein he is subject to another.⁴²

In *On the Waterfront*, longshoreman Terry Malloy (Marlon Brando) is torn between false and virtuous obligations with regard to promises. At the heart of the conflict is his loyalty to the gangster-led longshoremen’s union, and to his brother, Charlie (Rod Steiger) who is the right-hand man of the union’s leader, Johnny Friendly (Lee J. Cobb). Friendly and Charlie raised Terry, but both have already betrayed him, and his brother would betray him once again before the end of the story. Terry redeems himself by end of the film by finally choosing between the virtuous and the false with regard to the ethics of promising. The reason it is worth reminding

ourselves of the Thomist view of the promissory obligation is not only because it provides a convenient lens through which to help us guide ourselves through this film. The film itself also provokes such a reminder, by highlighting the role that Father Barry (Karl Malden), a Catholic priest, plays as challenger and partial catalyst of Terry's transformation.⁴³

One further bit of context for this film, and that is its relationship to its political environment and to the personal circumstances of the filmmaker, needs to be considered. *On the Waterfront* follows Kazan's two most explicitly anti-Communist films, *Viva Zapata!* and *Man on a Tightrope*. Some critics have tried to fit *Waterfront* into the mold of the two earlier ones. Gary Simmons, for example, explicitly tries to place *Waterfront* within the context of Kazan's HUAC testimony; however, Kazan himself has been ambivalent on this issue.⁴⁴ The absence from the film of Cold War genre film stereotyped Communists seems to suggest that any effort to look for anti-Communist thematic material in *Waterfront* could end up being a diversion.⁴⁵

At the same time, it should be remembered that in 1954 the Communist Party became the first U.S. political party to be outlawed in the country's history. Membership in the organization was criminalized, with stiff penalties for violators.⁴⁶ The anti-Communist crusade of the late 1940s and early 1950s had succeeded in rendering, in popular culture and in the popular mind alike, U.S. Communists as being indistinguishable from racketeers. One can see, then, how it is possible to view the racketeer-dominated union in the film as a metaphor for the relationship between the Communists and labor unions. Doing so, however, short-changes the world that *On the Waterfront* depicts. For one thing, the longshoreman's union on the East Coast docks had already gained a reputation for its willingness to engage in strike action to back up its demands, and for allegations of corruption. The West coast longshoreman's union, the International Longshore and Warehouseman's Union (ILWU), had been expelled from the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in 1949 as a left-wing union. On the other hand, the International Longshoreman's Association (ILA), an American Federation of Labor affiliate based on the East Coast, was, by the early 1950s, in such trouble with the Federation and with the authorities over corruption issues that the AFL launched another union in hopes of replacing it.⁴⁷

The story of the ILA's encounter with the New York State Crime Commission in the early 1950s is dramatized in *On the Waterfront*, and, as in all of Kazan's best pictures, the ethical story is told, in part, through a love story. Terry Malloy is courting Edie (Eva Marie Saint), the

sister of Joey Doyle, the longshoreman who, with Terry's unwitting complicity, was thrown from his apartment building roof by some of Johnny Friendly's lieutenants for threatening to testify to the crime commission. Edie and Terry are sitting at a table in a bar, and, in an effort to make conversation, Terry offers to tell Edie his philosophy of life. "Listen, down here it's every man for himself," he says. "It's keeping alive, standing with the right people so you get change jingling in your pocket." "And if you don't?" Edie asks. Terry responds by balling his fist and pointing his thumb downward: "If you don't? Right down." This conversation is one of the catalytic points in the film, in part, because ethical complexity is foregrounded here even more poignantly than in the famous speech Father Barry gives over the corpse of the murdered informant Kayo Duggan (Pat Henning) a couple of scenes later. Terry is here beginning to articulate the ethical dilemma that he faces. His expression of loyalty to Friendly and Charlie in his "standing with the right people" remark is clearly a justification, and Terry has not yet come to the realization that such loyalty is illegitimate. At the end of the scene, Terry and Edie encounter one of Johnny's men, who tells Terry that Johnny wants to see him. Terry stalls. Then the Crime Commission investigators (Leif Erikson and Martin Balsam) hand Terry a subpoena. That moment catalyzes a sequence of events that lead to Terry the realization of the illegitimacy of his promises of loyalty to Friendly; however, the realization is only cemented after Friendly's gang kills Terry's brother. After that, Terry testifies before the Commission, is ostracized from his community for doing so, and, in a dramatic sequence that closes the film, redeems both himself and the value of trust.

Yet in order to redeem himself, Terry must betray others, or at least that's how he feels. As we have seen, a promise made through coercion is not a legitimate one, and Terry is on good grounds (good *Thomist* grounds, in particular), for turning his back on Johnny Friendly. Terry was close to a decision to testify, and the scene in the cab with Charlie shows the last moments of his ambivalence, but it took Charlie's murder, Terry's failed revenge quest, and the subsequent confrontation with Father Barry, to finally push him to testify.

The single factor in *On the Waterfront* that makes Terry's decision to testify ethically unproblematic is the fact that Friendly's gang is a criminal enterprise. It was critical during the McCarthy era for the authorities to delegitimize the left-wing movement by rhetorically criminalizing it and then by legislatively turning it into a criminal enterprise. This is one reason

that *On the Waterfront* can tell the story of an informer and have the analogy with Communists become one that springs to mind for audiences and critics alike. The association, however, was not of Kazan's making alone. He was taking advantage of a confluence of social, political, and cultural forces that were driving discourse in the United States during the middle 1950s.

The fact that Friendly and his group were devoted criminals, rather than criminalized political actors, was crucial. *On the Waterfront* was taking part in a pair of larger discourses, and in order to be effective there, it was essential that there be no question about the legitimacy of the object of Terry Malloy's ethical dilemma. Friendly's gang favored coercion and violence over persuasion and propaganda. Without this crucial factor, Terry's decision to testify would have been as problematic for the audience as it initially was for some of those in the film's fictional world. That world included people like the neighbor who passes Terry on the stairs without speaking when he comes home from testifying, or the adolescent boys who were Terry's rooftop companions. They had joined him in caring for a flock of pet pigeons. Terry came home to find his pigeons dead apparently killed by his young (former) friends. In the end, though, Terry earns legitimacy from his decision to testify before the Crime Commission because the falsity of his previous loyalty has been revealed, at first to the audience, then to those who loved him, to his community, and finally to Terry himself. *On the Waterfront* reveals Terry's previous, false loyalty as devoid of virtue, unlawful, and indecent.

Conclusion: "Lying to myself," or telling the truth⁴⁸

Kazan has written that *America America* (1963) may not be his best film, but it is his personal favorite. The story of his uncle's agonizing coming to America has become a classic of immigration films. *America America*, however, is less unique among his films than generally regarded. Even though it is bound by an actual personal history and the complexities of Asia Minor culture, *America America*'s many betrayals, deceits, and identity issues personalize the themes found throughout Kazan's canon and may give a hint of their origins.

One other great paradox of Kazan's film career is that he never quite stopped having a conversation with the artistic left wing. Indeed, if one focuses on the aesthetic arguments of the 1930s and 1940s over what constituted a "working class" art work, what constituted a "progressive" art work, and what was the responsibility of the left-wing filmmaker, it is possible

to posit a great many of Kazan's films as responses and rejoinders to these arguments. If he never truly stepped outside of these conversations, if he never truly rejected them as a basis for his own aesthetics, it is in part because of his own role in helping initiate these conversations in the first place. One of the many points of origin of these conversations, at least as far as dramatic storytelling was involved, was in the Group Theater in the 1930s; they continued in modified form in the approach to realism that lay behind the aesthetic of The Method and the Actor's Studio, an aesthetic that informed many of Kazan's great films.

One will get very little of all this from listening to what Kazan himself has to say. Kazan spent fifty years rewriting and repudiating much of the first twenty years of his artistic life. He was an important member of the left-wing filmmakers' community in the United States until April 10, 1952, the day he testified before HUAC in an open, public session. If one reads his own explanations of his actions as justifications, the temptation to read the bulk of his post-testimony films in a similar way should be resisted, because such a view might hinder an understanding of the ethical concerns that occupied Kazan throughout his career. In addition, the relationship between the dramatic narratives of his films and the characterizations he drew from his actors, on the one hand, and the subsequent political and cultural oppositional developments in our society on the other, could be overlooked. For example, the appeal of Kazan's Brando, the characterizations he drew from Hunter, Dean, Clift, Dunaway, and, to a limited extent, Natalie Wood in *Splendor in the Grass*, all speak to the then-new sensibility that played such a big role in shaping society and its mores during the last decades of the twentieth century. The contributions of some of these roles to the Beat generation's idea of itself alone is just one example of how Kazan's leftism became relevant to the newer left wing culture that emerged in the decades after his HUAC testimony. The ethical concerns that Kazan worked with in his films were also part of this sensibility to the degree that questions of personal integrity and authenticity, so important to the rebellious cultures that emerged after the early 1950s, could be seen as a continuation of the culture of social commitment that dominated the Left in the pre-McCarthy era decades. In his attempts to distance himself from his past, Kazan, using language that echoes sentences that can be found in some of the most far-reaching anti-Communist legislation, sought to build a wall between himself, that past and the left-wing community of which he had long been a part. It turns out, however, that Elia Kazan could extinguish his

associations with every left-wing filmmaker in Hollywood except the left-wing filmmaker within himself.

¹James Hoberman. "The Cine Phile: Electricity for All." *The Village Voice* 14-20 Oct. 1999, page 50.

²All of Kazan's stage, film, and written works are available in the archival section of *The Selected Letters of Elia Kazan* edited by Albert J. Devlin with Marlene J. Devlin. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, pages 615-633.

³*Gentleman's Agreement* (1947), *Pinky* (1949), *Panic in the Streets* (1950), *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1951), *Viva Zapata!* (1952), *Man on a Tightrope* (1953), *On the Waterfront* (1954), *East of Eden* (1955), *A Face in the Crowd* and *Baby Doll* (1957), *Wild River* (1960), *Splendor in the Grass* (1961), and *America America* (1963).

⁴Biographical information about Kazan can be found in his autobiography (Elia Kazan. *Elia Kazan: A Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988 [De Capo edition, 1997] while Young (Jeff Young. *Kazan: The Master Director Discusses His Films*. New York: Newmarket Press, 1999) contains the director's comments on each of his canonical films. Scorsese (Martin Scorsese, Martin, ed. *The Elia Kazan Collection*. DVD set. 20th Century-Fox, 2010) contains fifteen of the director's films, plus a tribute film directed by Scorsese. All films by Kazan discussed in this essay, except *The Arrangement*, are from this collection.

⁵The term "White Negro" comes from Norman Mailer (Norman Mailer, "The White Negro." In *Advertisements for Myself*. New York: Putnam, 1981, pages 29-320. Reprinted. from *Dissent* IV (1957). The essay describes the phenomenon of the "hipster," first identified by Anatole Broyard (Anatole Broyard. "A Portrait of the Hipster." *Partisan Review* 6 (June 1948): 721-27), and is meant to describe white people who created an African American-influenced counterculture, or what Howard Becker (Howard Becker. *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press, 1963) called an "outsider" or "deviant" culture. For a more modern discussion, see Steve Shoemaker. "Norman Mailer's 'White Negro': Historical Myth or Mythical History?" *Twentieth Century Literature* 37. 3 (1991), pages 343-360.

⁶Father Barry (Karl Malden) in *On the Waterfront* is presented as vaguely Irish, without any of the Irish priest stereotypes common to the era's films.

⁷Lee Strasberg. *A Dream of Passion: The Development of the Method*. New York: Plume, 1987, page 63.

⁸In a letter that Tennessee Williams wrote to Kazan early in their discussions about putting *A Streetcar Named Desire* on Broadway, we find this sentence: "Finding a director aside from yourself who can bring this play to life exactly as if it were happening in life is going to be a problem" Kazan, *A Life*, De Capo edition, 1997, page 330.

⁹See Brian Neve. "Elia Kazan's First Testimony to the House Committee on Un-American Activities, Executive Session, 14 January 1952." *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 25.2 (2005), pages 251-272.

¹⁰Kazan, *A Life*, De Capo edition, (1997), pages 456-476; Young, *The Master*, pages 118-121.

¹¹Neve, *Kazan's Testimony*, (2005), pages 256-57; United States House of Representatives. Subcommittee of the Committee on Un-American Activities. "Communist Infiltration of Hollywood Motion Picture Industry," Part 7. 82nd Cong., 2d sess. Washington: Government Printing Office, 1952. This document contains hearings for January 24 and 28, February 5, March 20, and April 10 and 30, 1952. Edward G. Robinson testified twenty days after Kazan's April 10 session.

¹²See Kazan, *A Life*, De Capo, pages 444-465; Geoffrey Jacques. "Bridge of Spies." *Cineaste* 41.2 (2016), pages 50-51; Jerry Schwartz. "Career-Destroyer Kazan Stirs Up an Oscar Storm: Award For the Director Who Identified Communists is Decried by Those He Fingering." *Vancouver Sun* 10 March 1999, C4. Retrieved from Lexus Nexus 6 November 2016.

¹³For a review of the literature to 2004, see the Kazan entries in John Earl Haynes. "A Bibliography of Communism, Film, Radio and Television." *Film History* 16.4 (2004), pages 396-423.

¹⁴For a discussion of the "content" issue, see Gerald Horne. *The Final Victim of the Blacklist: John Howard Lawson, Dean of the Hollywood Ten*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, pages 184-185.

¹⁵Communist screenwriter John Howard Lawson, who spent a year in a federal penitentiary under contempt of Congress charges arising out of testimony he gave before HUAC, wrote, in 1953, a book that places *Viva Zapata!* within the context of Kazan's HUAC testimony, and alleges that the film is, in a sense, driven by its historical inaccuracies. See John Howard Lawson. *Film in the Battle of Ideas*. New York: Masses and Mainstream, 1953, pages 38-50.

¹⁶Menjou had been one of the better-known "friendly" witnesses before HUAC. See Horne, *The First Victim*, page 231 and Jon Lewis. "'We Do Not Ask You to Condone This': How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood." *Screen Journal* 39 (2000), pages 3-30.

¹⁷Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994, page 77.

¹⁸Ibid, page 82.

¹⁹Michael Rogin. "'Democracy and Burnt Cork': The End of Blackface, the Beginning of Civil Rights." *Representations* 46 (1994), page 16:

²⁰Werner Sollors. *Neither Black nor White Yet Both: Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pages 361-394.

In addition to these books, at least two big budget films had been made using racial passing as catalytic, if secondary themes: *Imitation of Life* (1934), and *Showboat* (1936).

²¹Elsbeth Kydd. "The Ineffaceable Curse of Cain": Racial Marking and Embodiment in *Pinky*." *Camera Obscura* 15.1 (2000), pages 97-98.

²²See: Christopher John Jones. "Image and Ideology in Kazan's 'Pinky.'" *Literature/Film Quarterly* 9.2 (1981), page 110-20 and Margaret T. Gehee. "Disturbing the Peace: Lost Boundaries, *Pinky*, and Censorship in Atlanta, Georgia, 1949-1952." *Cinema Journal* 46.1 (2006), pages 23-51.

²³Ralph Ellison. *Shadow and Act*. New York: Vintage, 1964, pages 279-80.

²⁴Larry Barnett. "Anti-Miscegenation Laws." *Family Life Coordinator* 13.4 (1964), pages 95-97.

²⁵"The Motion Picture Production Code" (1930). In Thomas Doherty. *Pre-Code Hollywood: Sex, Immorality, and Insurrection in American Cinema, 1930-1934*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. See the clause banning "miscegenation" (363).

²⁶O'Neal (1905-1992) was an African American character actor who was blacklisted in the 1950s before he went on to become the first black president of Actors' Equity Association (1964-1973), as well as an AFL-CIO vice president. Among the African American actors, Kazan used in his films were several that played other nationalities, such as Frank Silvera, who played Mexican president Huerta in *Viva Zapata!* and Estelle Helmsley, who played the grandmother in *America America*. O'Neal's Jake Walters and Ethel Waters's Dicey are among the most fully realized identifiably black characters in the Kazan canon. See Shiela Rule, "Frederick O'Neal, 86, Actor and Equity President." *The New York Times* 17 August 1992. www.nytimes.com. Accessed 17 December 2016. See also "From Actor to Activist: Frederick Douglass O'Neal," in Frank Manchel, *Every Step a Struggle: Interviews with Seven Who Shaped the African American Image in Movies* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007), pages 439-463. In what is probably the most sustained examination of Kazan's use of black characters, Philip C Kolin writes about the mainly non-speaking characters in *Baby Doll*, who mostly laugh at the main (white) characters' antics in the movie ("Civil Rights and the Black Presence in *Baby Doll*, *Literature/Film Quarterly* 24.1, 1996, pages 2-11. He calls Kazan's deployment of these characters to laugh at the film's stars a "strategy to disclose the vulnerability of the white infrastructure and so discredit the customs of the bigoted" world of the film, page 4.

²⁷This theme shows up in African American literature in novels such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper. *Iola Leroy* 1892. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987 and James Weldon Johnson. *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*. 1912. New York: Dover Publications, 1995.

²⁸Edward S. Shapiro. "World War II and American Jewish Identity." *Modern Judaism* 10.1 (1990), pages 65-84. The quotation is from pages 68-69. For a robust discussion of anti-Semitism in Hollywood and its impact on the Red Scare that engulfed the industry in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Jon Lewis. "'We Do Not Ask You to Condone This': How the Blacklist Saved Hollywood." *Screen Journal* 39 (2000), pages 3-30.

²⁹Ruth G. Weintraub. *How Secure these Rights? Anti-Semitism in the United States in 1948: An Anti-Defamation League Survey*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1949, page 11.

The term "gentleman's agreement" refers to racially restrictive real estate covenants, or agreements, that were used to enforce racist and anti-Semitic segregation. In 1948, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that such covenants were unenforceable under the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. See *Shelley v. Kraemer*, 334 U.S. 1 (1948). Also see Jeffrey D. Gonda. *Unjust Deeds: The Restrictive Covenant Cases and the Making of the Civil Rights Movement*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.

³⁰Kazan, *A Life*, De Capo edition, page 333.

³¹Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Trans. Terence Irwin. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985. (1985), pages 110-111.

³²Zac Cogley. "Trust and the Trickster Problem." *Analytic Philosophy* 53.1 (2012), page 35.

³³Ibid., page 45.

³⁴Tennessee Williams. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. (1947). New York: New Directions, 2004, page 179.

³⁵Kazan, *A Life*, De Capo edition, page 434.

³⁶The original Broadway production ran for two weeks in late 1948. It starred several actors who also appeared in the film, including Brando, Hunter, and Malden. Jessica Tandy played Blanche DuBois on Broadway. She won a

Tony Award for her performance. The play won the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 1948, while the film won four Academy Awards, including acting awards for Leigh, Malden, and Hunter. See the entries on "A Streetcar Named Desire" in *Internet Broadway Database*. Accessed 10 November 2016. <https://www.ibdb.com/> and *Internet Movie Database* (2016).

³⁷ Charles Matthews, *Oscar A to Z: A Complete Guide to more than 2,400 Movies Nominated for Academy Awards*. (NY: Doubleday, 1995), pages 830 and 582.

³⁸ Mailer, *Dissent* (1957), n.p.

³⁹ In one such scene, an African American man is passing in front of the Kowalski-DuBois house, elegantly dressed in what looks like a well-made suit, tie, hat, and shoes. Michael Harrington has observed that clothes "make the poor invisible too: America has the best-dressed poverty the world has ever known." He explains this status as a result of the benefits of mass production. Michael Harrington. *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*. Baltimore: Penguin, 1963, page 12.

⁴⁰ Thomas Aquinas. *Summa Theologica*. 1273. Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province. London: Burns Oats & Washburn, 1922, Q. 88. Art 1 (pages 105-106).

⁴¹ Many of these points are also discussed by John Rawls. *A Theory of Justice*. 1971. Rev. ed. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999, pages. 303-308.

⁴² Aquinas, *Summa*, Q. 88 Art 8 (page 121).

⁴³ Karl Malden's character, Father Barry, was inspired by the "labor priest" John M. "Pete" Corridan, S.J. He preached to dockworkers on the Hudson River, between Manhattan and New Jersey. See Bernard F. Dick, "The Potato Eater Priest: *On the Waterfront*'s Father Barry and His Real-life Counterpart," and Stephen Schwartz, "Comments on Corridan," *American Communist History* 9.3 (2010), pages 235-238 and 247-251. The Jesuit Order was deeply influenced by Thomist philosophy. For an overview, see Oliver P. Rafferty, S.J., "The Thomistic Revival and the Relationship between the Jesuits and the Papacy, 1878-1914." *Theological Studies* 75.4 (2014), pages 746-773. One ironic result of the foregrounding of a Catholic priest in *Waterfront* is that the film has landed on the Vatican's list of 45 favorite films. See United States Conference of Bishops. "Vatican Best Film List." Retrieved 10 November 2016. <http://archive.usccb.org/movies/vaticanfilms.shtml>.

⁴⁴ Gary Simmons. "Conscience, Confessions, and Context in *On the Waterfront*." *Screen Education* 56 (2009), page 95 and Young, *That Master Director*, pages 117-125. Also see Jeffrey Shaman. "On The Waterfront: Cheese-Eating, HUAC, and The First Amendment." *Constitutional Commentary* 20 (2003), page 131.

⁴⁵ Screenwriter Budd Schulberg vehemently denied any connections between his and Kazan's friendly HUAC testimony and the testimony of Malloy in *On the Waterfront*. See Schulberg's foreword to Joanna E. Rapf (ed.). *On the Waterfront*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003 and his comments in that volume in Dan Georgakas, "Schulberg on the Waterfront," pages 40-61.

⁴⁶ See United States Government Publishing Office. *Communist Control Act of 1954*. Accessed 14 November 2016. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-68/pdf/STATUTE-68-Pg775.pdf>.

⁴⁷ A brief version of this history can be found in Kristen Monaco and Lindy Olsson. "Labor at the Ports: A Comparison of the ILA and ILWU." Research Gate. Accessed 14 November 2016. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Kristen_Monaco/publication/237442388_Labor_at_the_Ports_A_Comparison_of_the_ILA_and_ILWU/links/004635297631e3aec8000000.pdf.

⁴⁸ "Lyin' to Myself" is a song composed by Hoagy Carmichael with lyrics by Stanley Adams, published in 1936. It was recorded by Louis Armstrong that year. The lyrics begin: "I'm lyin' to myself/Cryin' to myself/Tryin' to make believe my baby's on the shelf;/But it's more than I can do,/Tryin' to find a way to bluff it through." See Louis Armstrong and His Orchestra. "Lyin' to Myself." Decca 835. Rec. 18 May 1936. *Heart Full of Rhythm*. Decca CD GRD 620 (1993).