

## Document A

[Studs Terkel is famous for his oral histories of American people. The following extract is an example taken from his 1980 book *American Dreams: Lost and Found*.]

### FANTASIA

Jill Robinson

*She is the daughter of a former Hollywood film producer.*

Growing up in Hollywood was the only reality I knew. The closest I ever came to feeling glamorous was from my mother's maid, a woman named Dorothy, who used to call me Glamour. She was black. In those days, she was called colored. When I would see my mother—or my mother's secretary, 'cause there was a hierarchy—interviewing maids or cooks, I'd think of maids and cooks represented in the movies.

I used not to go to school. I'd go to work with my father. I'd like to be with him because power didn't seem like work. He had four or five secretaries, and they were always pretty. I thought: How wonderful to have pretty secretaries. I used to think they'd be doing musical numbers. I could imagine them tapping along with his mail. I never saw it real.

To me, a studio head was a man who controlled everyone's lives. It was like being the principal. It was someone you were scared of, someone who knew everything, knew what you were thinking, knew where you were going, knew when you were driving on the studio lot at eighty miles an hour, knew that you had not been on the set in time. The scoldings the stars got. There was a paternalism. It was feudal. It was an archaic system designed to keep us playing: Let's pretend, let's make believe.

First of all, you invented someone, someone's image of someone. Then you'd infantilize them, keep them at a level of consciousness, so they'd be convinced that this is indeed who they are. They had doctors at the studios: "Oh, you're just fine, honey. Take this and you'll be just fine." These stars, who influenced our dreams, had no more to do with their own lives than fairies had, or elves.

I remember playing with my brother and sister. We would play Let's Make a Movie the way other kids would play cowboys and Indians. We'd cry, we'd laugh. We'd do whatever the character did. We had elaborate costumes and sets. We drowned our dolls and all the things one does. The difference was, if we didn't get it right, we'd play it again until we liked it. We even incorporated into our child play the idea of the dailies and the rushes. The repeats of film scenes to get the right angle. If the princess gets killed in a scene, she gets killed again and again and again. It's okay. She gets to live again. No one ever dies. There's no growing up. This was reality to us.

I had a feeling that out there, there were very poor people who didn't have enough to eat. But they wore wonderfully colored rags and did musical numbers up and down the streets together. My mother did not like us to go into what was called the servants' wing of the house.

My mother was of upper-class Jewish immigrants. They lost everything in the depression. My father tried to do everything he could to revive my mother's idea of what life had been like for her father in the court of the czar. Whether her father was ever actually in the court is irrelevant. My father tried to make it classy for her. It never was good enough, never could be. She couldn't be a Boston Brahmin.

Studs Terkel, *American Dreams: Lost and Found*,  
New York: The New Press, 1980, pp. 51-52

## Document B

[This part of the novel is set in the 1960s.]

*Beautiful but not very bright. Transparent (breakable?) as glass.*

*Her soul. Can see into. Shallow, vulnerable.*

In the smokers' loge in a rear seat. Ten minutes into the movie he became restless, distracted. He very much disliked the music score: obtrusive, heavy-handed. The stalwart melodrama of *The Miracle Worker* failed to engage him, who had come to see that failure is the human condition, not victory over odds; for each Helen Keller who triumphs, there are tens of millions who fail, mute and deaf and insensate as vegetables tossed upon a vast garbage pile to rot. In such moods the shimmering film-images, mere lights projected onto a tacky screen, could not work their magic.

Yet we yearn for the miracle worker, to redeem us.

Gallagher's bladder ached. He'd had a few beers that day. He rose from his seat, went to use the men's lavatory. This tacky tawdry smelly place. In fact he knew the owner, and he knew the manager. The Bay Palace Theater had been built before the war in a long-ago era. Art deco ornamentation, a slickly Egyptian motif popular in the 1920s. His father's boyhood, adolescence. When the world had been glamorous.

Wanting to look for the ponytailed young woman. But he would not. He was too old: forty-one. She was possibly half his age. And so naive, trusting.

The way she'd lifted her beautiful eyes to his. As if no one had ever rebuffed her, hurt her.

She had to be very young. To be so naive.

He hadn't wanted to stare at her left breast where a name had been stitched in crimson thread. He wasn't that kind of man, to stare at a girl's breasts. But he could call the manager, whom he knew from the Malin Head bar, and inquire.

*That new girl? Selling tickets last night?*

*Too young for you, Gallagher.*

He wanted to protest, he felt young. In his soul he felt young. Even his face still looked boyish, despite the lines in his forehead, and his receding hair. When he smiled, his pointed devil's-teeth flashed.

In some quarters of Malin Head Bay he was known and respected as a Gallagher: a rich man's son. Deliberately he wore old clothes, took little care with his appearance. Hair straggling past his collar and often didn't shave for days. He ate in taverns and diners. He was one to leave inappropriately large tips. He had an absentminded air like one who has been drinking even when he has not been drinking only just thinking and taxing his brain. Finding his way back to his seat without drifting out into the lobby looking for the usherette. He felt a stab of shame for the way he'd spoken to her, as a pretext for provoking her into reacting; he hadn't been sincere but she had answered him sincerely, from the heart.

When *The Miracle Worker* ended in a swirl of triumphant movie-music at 10.58pm, and the small audience filed out, Gallagher saw that the ticket seller's booth was darkened, the young ponytailed woman in the usherette's costume was gone.

Joyce Carol Oates, *The Gravedigger's Daughter*,  
New York: Harper Perennial, 2008 (first published 2007), pp. 380-381

Document C



Edward Hopper (1882-1967), *New York Movie*, 1939  
Oil on canvas, 32¼x401/8in (81.9x101.9cm)  
The Museum of Modern Art, New York; given anonymously