

“Judy Garland”

Exemplar Passage

This article provides an insight into the difficulties facing a researcher looking into the past of Judy Garland - a Hollywood star - where illusion and reality are difficult to separate.

JUDY GARLAND

1 Judy Garland is most famous for her portrayal of Dorothy in “The Wizard of Oz”. To understand Judy Garland, one must try to understand Hollywood. Any researcher delving into that fantastical collection of images must sift, like some drunken archeologist, through a glittering garbage heap of strange tales, myths, half-truths and outright lies. There are facts too, but they sometimes seem bland and commonplace. In comparison with the shimmering brilliance of the Hollywood illusion, the truth might seem mundane. The ruins of Judy’s past are booby-trapped with carefully planted stories. Even after thirty years, nuggets of misinformation still lie there, waiting to blow up in the face of the
7 unwary researcher.

Even if he is able to negotiate this minefield, the researcher must still be on his guard. Like ancient scrolls, the memories and the anecdotes of some associates require careful interpretation and investigation into their origins. The memories of some survivors are sweetened to the point where they are sickly, sugar-coated and spurious. Others have recounted their tales with a self importance and an - “*I was there. You should read my autobiography*”- attitude, which leads us to question their motives. For others, the stories are retold with a reverence and precision that is well
13 rehearsed but lacking in authenticity.

As for any story that can be traced back to one of the major studios, it is automatically suspect. Hollywood was in the business of remaking reality. The truth was dispensable.

16 Stars were dispensable too, as Judy Garland eventually discovered. Hollywood was an arena of power where the strong consumed the weak, usually without malice, intent only on success. Judy Garland had nothing to offer but talent in a society where talent was merely a commodity - a natural resource to be exploited - even in a child. She was surrounded by men who had developed the habit of ruthlessness in their dealings with the world at large.

20 Hollywood destroyed Judy Garland’s childhood by trivialising it into oblivion, a process that started the day Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s publicity department first turned its attention to her. She lacked the stability and security to resist the relentless erosion of fact and eventually, she came to believe many of the myths invented for her. She found it increasingly difficult to accept reality. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, and tragically, Judy sought solace in alcohol and other substances and died at the age of 47.

25 When writing about Judy Garland’s early life, biographers have - unfortunately - relied heavily on material distributed over the years by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer publicists. This should be taken to include most magazine and newspaper stories written about her during her time at Metro, since the information they contain was generally fed directly or indirectly, from the studio. The other main biographical source has been Judy’s own recollections of her childhood, as published in various periodicals. There are occasional moments of honesty in these memoirs, but the overall chain of events she presents does not differ substantially from what will be found in early publicity stories (and these are demonstrably false in many respects.) Judy did add one important element, though, when she
32 introduced a villain the studio publicists would never have: her own mother.

Judy described her mother as “the real life Wicked Witch of the West” - the archetypal, fire-eating, greedy, ambitious stage matron; a child-devouring monster that was always waiting in the wings.

35 Before she died, this supposed villain offered her own account of Judy’s beginnings. By then, she was estranged from her daughter and thoroughly disenchanted with M-G-M, and she wanted to correct some of the misinformation that had been so freely disseminated. She did soften some of the facts, but her version has a realistic basis that is almost entirely lacking in Judy’s contrived and theatrical recollections. Ultimately the insensitive manufacturing of reality caused innocent people to suffer. But in Hollywood, as in ancient Rome, no public entertainment was considered complete without someone being thrown to the lions.

Questions on Passage 1: “Judy Garland”

1. By looking closely at lines 1-13 identify **two** difficulties that face any researcher trying to establish the truth about Judy Garland. **Use your own words in your answer.** 2
2. **“bland”** (line 4) How does the context of lines 1-7 help you to understand the meaning of this word? 2
3. Explain the significance of the image **“glittering garbage heap”** (line 3) in conveying the writer’s argument in the opening of the passage? 2
4. **Using your own words**, identify **three** reasons why the **“memories”** in lines 8-13 might be unreliable. 3
5. How does paragraph three (lines 14-15) act as a link in the passage as a whole? 2
6. What is the writer’s view of Hollywood, as expressed in lines 16-19? **Use your own words in your answer** 1
7. How does the writer use imagery in lines 16-19 to illuminate the way Hollywood exploited its stars? 2
8. By referring to lines 20 – 24 explain how Judy Garland was affected by her involvement with Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer’s publicity department. **Use your own words in your answer.** 2
9. How does the writer use sentence structure to make clear his view in lines 25-32? 2
10. **“Judy did add her own mother”** (lines 31-32)
By referring to language, explain the effect of this section in conveying the writer’s attitude to Judy Garland? 3
11. How does the **word choice** and **sentence structure** contribute to the effectiveness of the image in describing Judy’s mother in lines 33-35? 4

Total (25)