



Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation

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"Working has been a book, a radio drama, a Broadway musical, and now a gripping graphic novel. I can't speak for Studs, but I suspect he would have been tickled to see it adapted by a former government file clerk and wage slave, who knows all about working." --Roger Ebert In the thirty-five years since Pulitzer Prize-winner Studs Terkel's *Working* was first published, it has captivated millions of readers with lyrical and heartbreakingly accounts of how their fellow citizens earn a living. Widely regarded as a masterpiece of words, it is now adapted into comic book form by comics legend Harvey Pekar, the blue-collar antihero of his American Book Award-winning comics series *American Splendor*.

In Studs Terkel's *Working*, Pekar offers a brilliant visual adaptation of Terkel's verbatim interviews, collaborating with both established comics veterans and some of the comic underground's brightest new talent. Here are riveting accounts of the lives of ordinary Americans--farmers, miners, barbers, hookers, box boys, stockbrokers--depicted with unsurpassed dignity and frankness. A visual treat with a visceral impact, Studs Terkel's *Working* will delight Terkel fans everywhere, and introduce his most powerful work to a new generation.

Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation Details

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From Reader Review Studs Terkel's Working: A Graphic Adaptation for online ebook

Chris - Quarter Press Editor says

I feel bad admitting it, but this is the first I'd heard of Studs Terkel. After having read this, I'm quite curious about his work and journalism. Collecting oral records of everyday life is something I find extremely interesting--and compelling, and I'll definitely be checking out his writing properly.

As for this particular collection / adaptation, some of the portions shine: the artwork is wonderful, the words serving the images and the images serving the words in a perfect balance. However, there are some that felt a bit of a mess to me, either too choppy to be a cohesive piece or the art simply being... not too good. This might not have been so problematic if some of the sections weren't so strongly done.

Given that Terkel's version is quite lengthy, this seems like a good stepping stone and an interesting entry to not only non-fiction but to graphic writing in general.

Kris says

"I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job. Most of us, like the assembly-line worker, have jobs that are too small for our spirit. Jobs are not big enough for people." (p. xxi, from the original introduction to Studs Terkel's "Working" (1974))

"This book, being about work, is by its very nature, about violence - to the spirit as well as to the body. It is about ulcers as well as accidents, about shouting matches as well as fistfights, about nervous breakdowns as well as kicking the dog around. It is, above all (or beneath all), about daily humiliations. To survive the day is triumph enough for the walking wounded among the great many of us." (p. xiii)

"It is about a search, too, for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor; in short, for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying. Perhaps immortality, too, is part of the quest. To be remembered was the wish, spoken and unspoken, of the heroes and heroines of this book." (p. xiii)

"Dolores Dante graphically describes the trials of a waitress in a fashionable restaurant. They are compounded by her refusal to be demeaned. Yet pride in her skills helps her make it through the night. "When I put the plate down, you don't hear a sound. When I pick up a glass, I want it to be just right. When someone says, "How come you're just a waitress?" I say, 'Don't you think you deserve being served by me?'" (p. xiv)

"Perhaps it is time the "work ethic" was redefined and its idea reclaimed from the banal men who invoke it. In a world of cybernetics, of an almost run-away technology, things are increasingly making things. It is for our species, it would seem, to go on to other matters. Human matters. Freud put it one way. Ralph Helstein puts it another. He is president emeritus of the United Packinghouse Workers of America. "Learning is work. Caring for children is work. Community action is work. Once we accept the concept of work as something meaningful - not just as the source of a buck - you don't have to worry about finding enough jobs." (p. xx)

Kristen Mcchesney says

While this is not a classic young adult book, within the graphic novel genre, this adaption of Studs Terkel's oral history "Working" would be a wonderful classroom resource. I have used a number of Terkel's oral histories in my classroom, in order to illustrate the historical lives of average Americans and as a general primary source. Students relly connect with the stories of peoples lives and it gives them a true persepective that we all are a part of a larger history. This recent adaptation of his book into a graphic novel presents a number of new ways to use his histories and present them to students. While there are a number of the oral histories thar may not be suitable to all ages and grade levels, many could be used from middle school through college. The various illustrators that were used in the graphic version also bring a unique view of the oral histories and a fresh way of interpreting Terkel's work. I think this is a really revolutionary way to write first person narratives to bring history to life with a twist. Perhaps the next step would be an American History textbook written in graphic novel format? I would love to see and teach that...

Jason says

From the original introduction to Studs Terkel's *Working*:

Perhaps it is time the "work ethic" was redefined and its idea reclaimed from the banal men who invoke it. In a world of cybernetics, of an almost runaway technology, things are increasingly making things. It is for our species, it would seem, to go on to other matters. Human matters. Freud put it one way, Ralph Helstein puts it another. He is president emeritus of the United Packinghouse Workers of America. "Learning is work. Caring for children is work. Community action is work. Once we accept the concept of work as something meaningful--not just as the source of a buck--you don't have to worry about finding enough jobs. There's no excuse for mules any more. Society does not need them. There's no question about our ability to feed and clothe and house everybody. The problem is going to come in finding enough ways for man to keep occupied, so he's in touch with reality." Our imaginations have obviously not yet been challenged. (p. xx)

Ocean says

BRILLIANT. these stories (most of them, anyway) lend themselves perfectly to the graphic novel format. most of these are really well-rendered, moving, smart and enraging (in a good way). this book helped me get over the guilt i feel for not being a 9-to-5 office person (despite the fact that i am currently, miserably, locked into a 9-to-5 job).

Thomas says

I wasn't getting around to reading anything by Studs Terkel or Harvey Pekar, so this book was really a 2-for-1 deal. Having read this, I have an appreciation for both men.

Terkel was certainly of an era, and that era was one in which American radicals had faith that unions would improve the fortune of workers. He was also of an era in which the average American didn't have experience promoting herself on social networks or aspiring to a gig on a reality TV show. I would imagine, 40 years later, that today's American workers would present their lives quite differently than did the subjects of this work (this is to say, their depictions are frank and very interesting).

Harvey Pekar seems to have done a great job excerpting pieces from the original collection, editing works from contributors, and contributing many pieces himself. Having not read the original, I can't speak to what was left out, but I liked most of what I read. The waitress and the musicians were especially interesting.

Sophie says

I NEED to read the original.

The style of life I myself am familiar with is the quotidian. -Harvey Pekar

In others, you see a rhythmic smoothing out of the hand down the chair arm, as though to smooth everything out and make it workable; in others, there is a working of the lips or a steady rocking. None of these could be called neurotic gestures, nor are they symptoms of acute fear; they help the constant calculation. -Richard Hoggart

At the public unveiling of a celebrated statue in Chicago, a lawyer, after deep study, mused, "I accept Mr. Picasso in good faith. But if you look at the height of the slope on top and the propensity of children who will play on it, I have a feeling that some child may fall and be hurt and the county may be sued..." -Studs Terkel

Some days are more sunny than others, some hours less astonishing than I'd hoped for; my occasional slovenliness infuriates me...but it is, for better or worse, in my hands. -Studs

Every time I would get behind in my chores, I would get a carrot thrown at me by my parents. -Roberto Acuna, Farmworker

I found myself haunted all night by the unplaceable girls. The unplaceable girls were me. -Barbara Terwilliger

Life doesn't frighten me anymore. There are only two things that relegate us-the bathroom and the grave. Either I'm gonna have to go to the bathroom now or I'm gonna die now. I go to the bathroom. -Dolores Dante

Most of these people retired, moved away, or they passed away. It's all on account of long hair. -Sam Mature, Barber

The windblown haircut. Their hair was all combed forward. It was like a gust of wind hits you in the back of the head, and blew your hair forward. Today young girls don't know what it is. -Sam Mature

A unimate is a welding robot that looks just like a praying mantis. It goes from spot to spot...it releases and it jumps back into position, ready for the next car. They never tire, sweat, complain or miss work. Of course, they don't buy cars. Guess GM doesn't understand that argument. -Gary Bryner

You have some fellas been up for many years and still don't know whether they're com'n or goin' -Elmer Ruiz

Lauren says

"The style of life I myself am familiar with is the quotidian. But just because one writes about everyday life doesn't mean it's uninteresting; in fact, I find it's most fascinating... Bravo to Terkel for documenting these fascinating lives."

Harvey Pekar, in the introduction to his graphic adaptation of Studs Terkel's WORKING.

If you're familiar with Terkel's Pulitzer-Prize winning oral history work, you know that this book is adapted from his 1974 work of the same name. Terkel's life work was telling stories, stories that often slip through the cracks. Terkel's work is synonymous with Chicago, the city where he had a popular radio show for decades, and wrote most of his books.

The lives of everyday people in all walks of life - with a distinct focus on #labor and getting by. He meets and hears the stories of coal miners, hair stylists, domestic workers, mail carriers, sex workers, accountants, musicians, teachers, and farmers. This adaptation gathers the work of multiple illustrators and comic artists, including Pekar's iconic style.

Interesting tidbit: I had the opportunity to meet Studs Terkel in August 2008 at a storytelling and oral history workshop in Chicago. That was two months before he died. I've long admired his work and his dedication to the art of listening.

Andrew Miller says

I loved the original book, Working, by Studs Terkel. This graphic novel adaptation which includes the work of Harvey Pekar amongst many other artists and storytellers is a fantastic addition. The partnership of this vast collection of personal stories from regular Americans combined with visual context, uncovers a layer of emotional and political complexity to the pieces which reading alone may not provide everyone.

Zachary says

"But every once in awhile there's stuff that comes in on you. All of a sudden something falls into place. Suppose you're driving an eight-penny galvanized finishing nail into this siding. Your whole universe is

rolled onto the head of that nail. Each lick is sufficient to justify your life. You say, "Okay, I'm not trying to get this nail out of the way so I can get onto something important. There's nothing more important. It's right there." And goes -- pow! It's not getting that nail in that's in your mind. It's hitting it -- hitting it square. Hitting it straight. Getting it now. That one lick."

Some good lessons in empathy across the stories. The glorification of union organizers is from a time I wasn't familiar with -- very odd.

Side note: fitting that the only book I read in January was called 'Working'...

Laura Missett says

Read for Atomic Books reading club. I am not familiar with the original work, but I liked reading the stories of these individuals and how they interact with the working world and also how that flows into their personal lives. I wanted more of a conclusion I guess or a purpose out of it that wasn't there. Also, for me, the stories were unrelatable because most of the scenarios don't exist today (for better or worse). It might be interesting for someone to do these style interviews with some modern examples. I like that they included persons of color and men and women alike.

Thomas Ray says

The comic-book format does nothing to soften the relentless parade of injustice and degradation. Among the few interviewees who *don't* describe their jobs as soul-destroying are the musicians. And even there, it's mostly playing soulless music for drunks. The bar pianist says, "I consider myself a whisky salesman." The jazz saxophonist tells of years of such work, and of labor-management problems, before he got the chance to be a *concert* musician in a *cooperative* band. And of course it took constant practice to get there and stay there.

And among the underclass, the farm work and domestic work exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act is not alone soul-destroying, but body-destroying, health-destroying as well.

Joseph Gagnon says

I was in this show back in the day, haha, thus HAD to read this when I spotted it at the library. It brought back some great memories. The comic itself was a fair read. I feel like a LOT of summarizing happened, but it was largely done well. I didn't care for some of the art. It felt kinda thrown together. All minor problems though. Mostly what shone through was Terkel's marvelous work. Well worth the time.

Snem says

The accounts of average American work in this illustrated reworking of the original essay collection is pretty incredible. I really liked the variety of artists that contributed. It made each piece stand out well. Each essay

was treated with honor and respect and it made me think about the dignity of work.

Reading about coal-mining or maid work isn't particularly light-hearted and fun. It's also dated and while toil is generally universally relatable and soul-crushing, some of the references don't hold up.

There is sorrow in here but also a lot of pride. If you have a job you can read this and take solace in the fact that you're not alone when you head off to work whether it's a 9 to 5 or a coal mine or in the home. Young people entering the workforce can get some inspiration from here and it's a quick read.

Aaron says

Having never read the Studs Terkel classic and finding myself in the midst of the job searching process, I decided to pick up this graphic novel adaptation. Generally it is really well done, with a variety of artists tackling a selection of stories from the original work. I was amazed at how adeptly people were able to articulate the tasks they carried out on a daily basis, alongside the deeper meditations about work and purpose and value in how we choose (or not) to spend a large portion of our lives.

Work is such an unexamined topic by the majority of the population, and I would love to see a slightly more modern valuation of this endeavor most of humanity shares. What do software developers and uber drivers and podcasters think of the work they do? How has the meaningfulness and/or futility of work waxed and waned over time?
