

# “Through the Trapdoor with Bob Neale”: Nine Session Exploring Thirteen Themes in Selected Works by Robert Neale



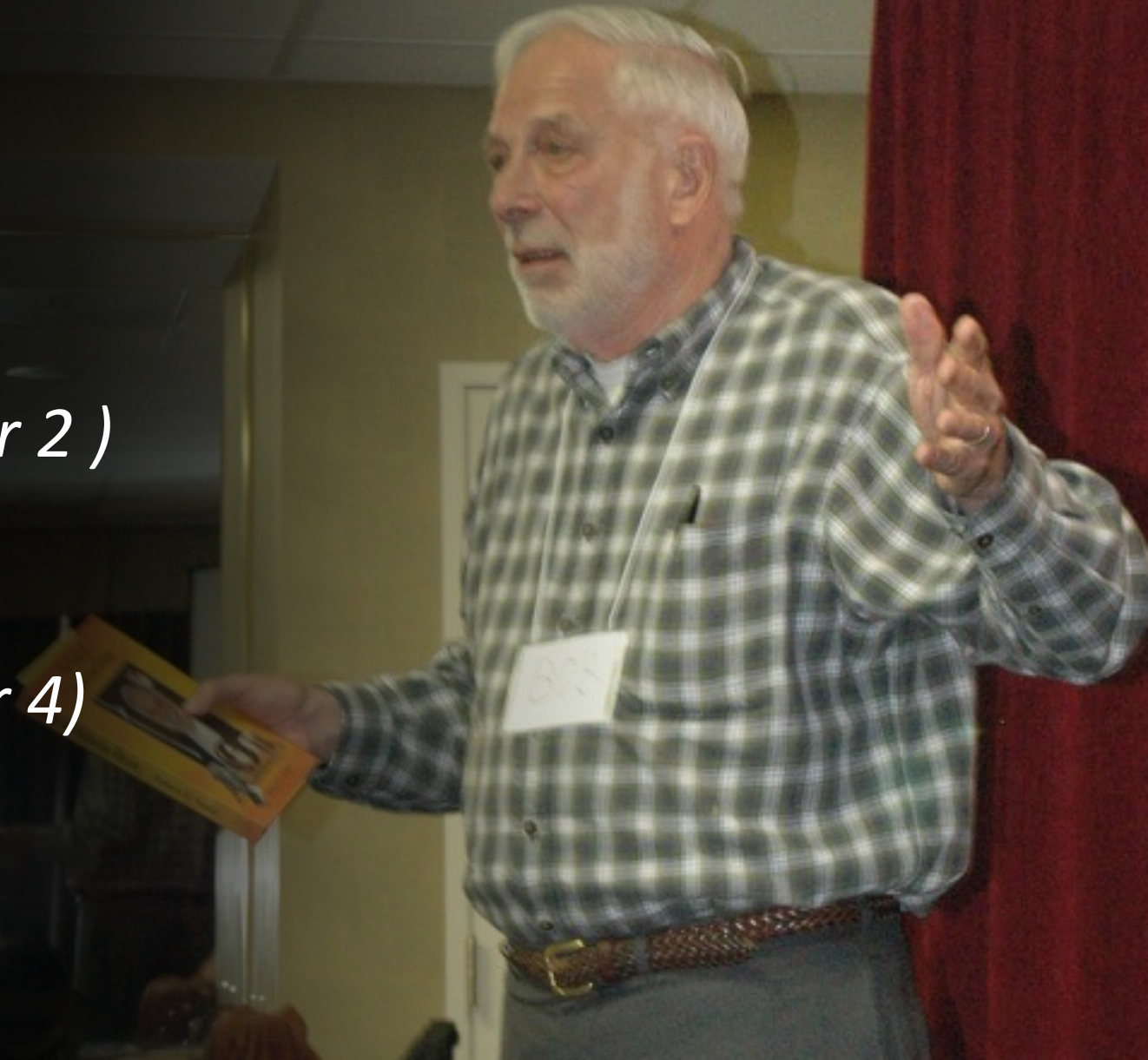
Hosted by  
Michael Smith and Geoff Grimes

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## Session 4: Wonder

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- 1) Will Wonders Never Cease  
*The Sense of Wonder (Chapter 2)*
- 2) Wonderworks  
*The Sense of Wonder (Chapter 4)*



# Session 4:

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## The Index— Identification of the 13 “themes”

Play

The Trickster Spirit

Paul Pruyser’s Three World Perspective

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Psychological Classification of Magic

The Ethical Heart of Spiritual Illusions: “The Four Falls”

Life and Death and . . .

THE 2018 MAGIC & MEANING CONFERENCE

## The Robert E. Neale Index

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A Resource for the Study of Robert E. Neale’s  
Trilogy of Magic

Prepared by Michael Smith and Geoffrey Grimes  
9/5/2018

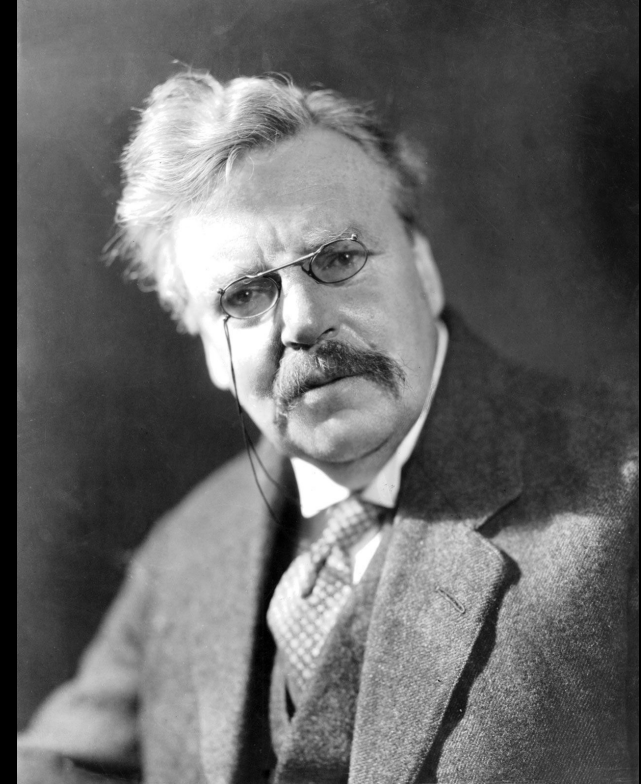
# Will Wonders Never Cease

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Some observations:

G. K. Chesterton:

“The world will never starve for want of wonders, but for want of wonder.”



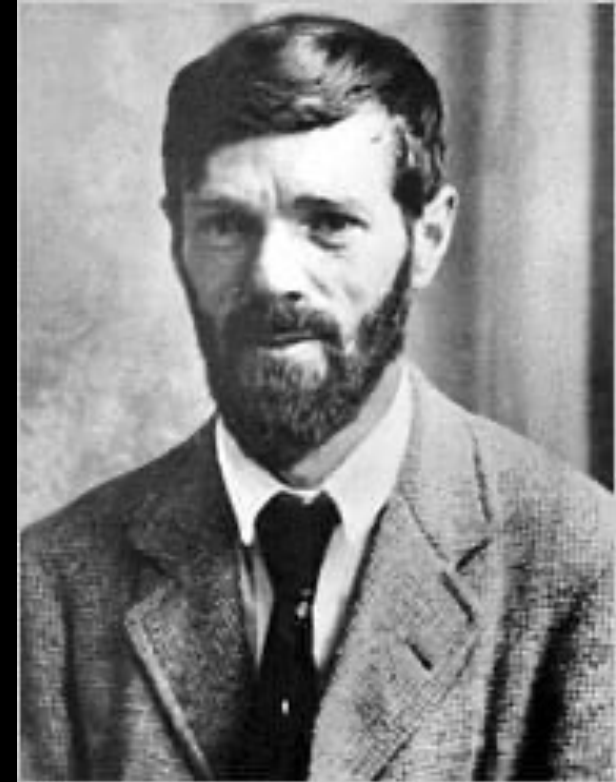
# Will Wonders Never Cease

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Some observations:

D. H. Lawrence:

“The sense of wonder,  
That is our sixth sense.  
And it is the natural religious sense.”





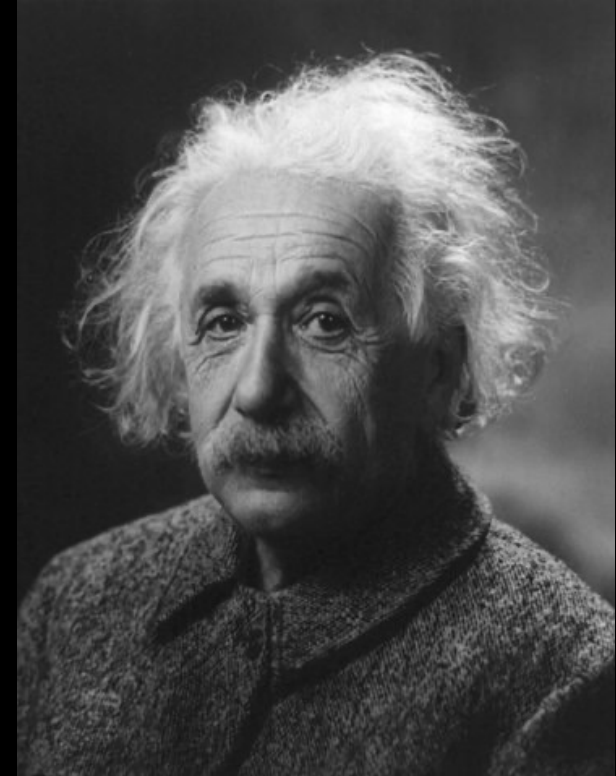
# Will Wonders Never Cease

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Some observations:

Albert Einstein:

“The man who has lost his power of wonder is a dead man.”



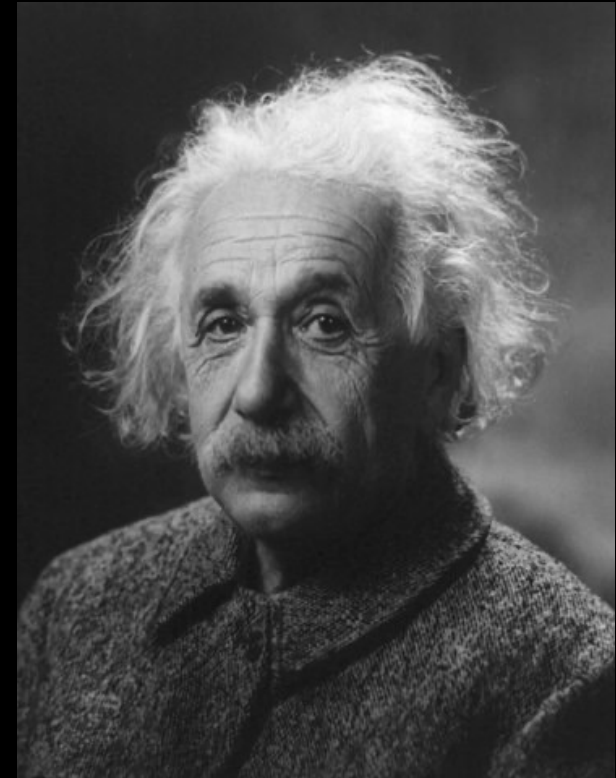
# Will Wonders Never Cease

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Some observations:

Albert Einstein:

“The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.”



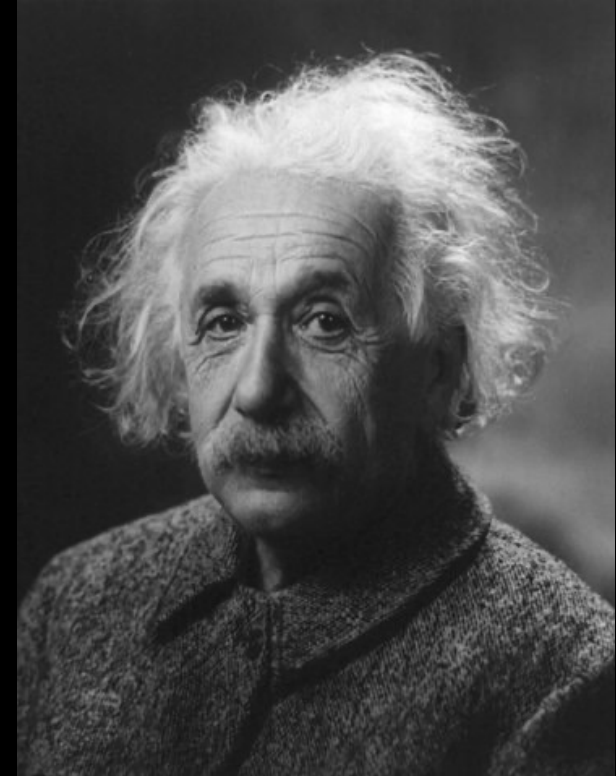
# Will Wonders Never Cease

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Some observations:

Albert Einstein:

“He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feels amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle.”





# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## A. What Wonder Is

Neale's definition of "wonder":

"What is wonder?

I would call it *respect*.

To respect is to *really see*.

Respect is exclaiming that something really *is*. It is paying attention.

Wonder is respect for what is."



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## A. What Wonder Is

Squatting

To wonder is to *squat . . . like a child.*

. . . Squatting More Fully



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## B. Where Wonder Is Directed

*Uncommon or Common*



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## B. Where Wonder Is Directed

*Uncommon or Common*  
*Inexplicable or Explicable*



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## B. Where Wonder Is Directed

*Uncommon or Common*  
*Inexplicable or Explicable*  
*Disorder or Order*



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## C. Stages of Wonder

- 1) Stage of Attention*
- 2) Stage of Awe*
- 3) Stage of Action*





# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## C. Stages of Wonder

### 1) *Stage of Attention*

“Something has to happen for wonder to occur. There is an event and we attend to it.”



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## C. Stages of Wonder

### 2) *Stage of Awe*

“We attend to what has happened with awe.”



# Will Wonders Never Cease

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## C. Stages of Wonder

### 3) *Stage of Action*

“Having attended to the fact that something awesome has happened, we are empowered to *explore, express, and celebrate.*”

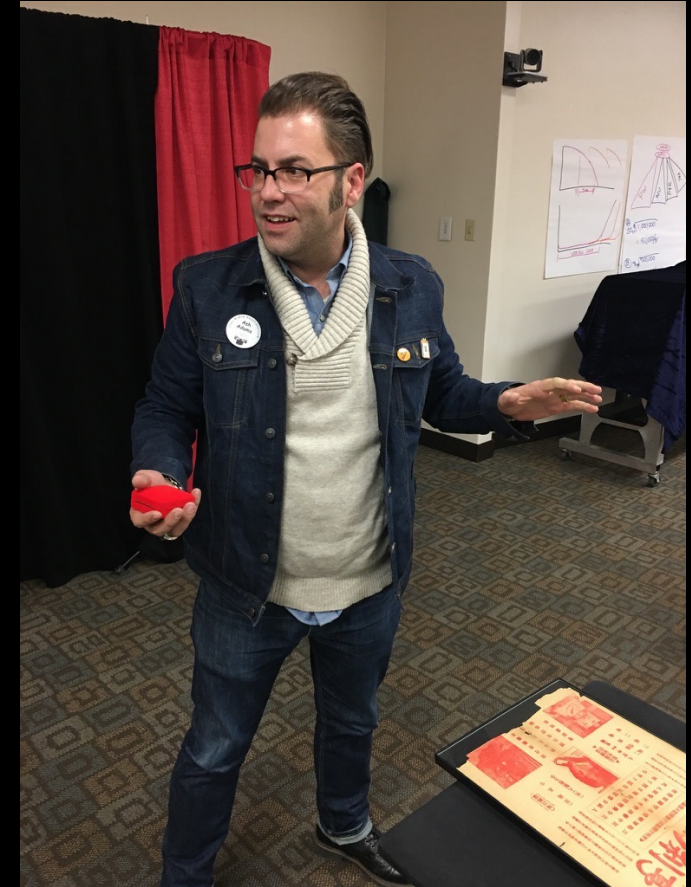


# Wonderwork

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A question:

“Is it possible our magic can avoid both trivia and re-enchantment by focusing on wonder? I believe it is.”



# Wonderwork

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*Trivial or Serious Magic?*  
We need them both.

“No magic is trivial.  
But most presentations of tricks are.  
This is as it should be.”





# Wonderwork

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## Three Dangers of Serious Magic:

- 1) Sentimentality
- 2) Pretentiousness
- 3) Destructiveness





# Wonderwork

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## B. Magic as Re-enchantment:

From the European Middle Ages, modern Western magic has become disenchanted and *secularized*.

The contemporary question:  
“Is re-enchantment possible? If so,  
is it advisable?”



# Wonderwork

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## B. Magic as Re-enchantment:

From Victor Walter's  
*High Magic: The Art of Re-enchantment:*

“A good magician is one whose work should lead you to enchantment, wonder, and mystery.”



# Wonderwork

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B. Magic as Re-enchantment:  
(from Victor Walter)

“A magician like me wants to leave the audience with an experience of enchantment, a sense of wonder, the feeling of hidden forces at the edge of our minds. The other kind wants to teach that every trick is a hoax. Conflict rages between the party of mystery and the party of disenchantment.”



# Wonderwork

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## B. Magic as Re-enchantment:

Neale's response:

As a means to coaxing a sense of some "other worldliness," Neale has no interest.



# Wonderwork

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## B. Magic as Re-enchantment:

Neale's response:

“At present, re-enchantment is the last goal I can imagine. My earlier forays into the theory of magic were loaded with implicit assumptions that sponsored depth, mystery, and meaning. I do not dismiss meaning, but depth and mystery are not of interest to me insofar as they include some hidden other reality.”





# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

Neale rejects the performance of magic as a guide to “what to believe.”

Neale asks, “So, how are we to conceive ourselves as magicians? How are we to live?”





# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

As “wonder-workers” are we to be  
‘fake miracle-workers’? . . . No!

“Wonder is an experience of respect for  
the presence of an object, person, or  
event.”

But . . .



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“While previously I felt comfortable with labeling wonder as holy or sacred, I no longer do. For me, paying full respect to something does not require making up or adopting all sorts of understandings about some supernatural reality . . . The wonder experience occurs. For me, that is sufficient.”



# Wonderwork

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C. Magic as Education:

A clue from John Gardner:

“Wonder is based upon the feeling that at the deepest levels the world and man’s true self are one” . . . “The aspirations and ideals, the beauty and goodness, which are natural to the human heart, lie somehow also at the center of the physical universe.”



# Wonderwork

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C. Magic as Education:

A clue from John Gardner:

“Wonder is based upon the feeling that at the deepest levels the world and man’s true self are one.”

Note, says Neale, the reference is to a “feeling,” not “a metaphysical conclusion.”



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“I could agree that mystery is a sign of “another reality,” but it is not a metaphysical or supernatural one.”



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“It is a psychological one in which subject-object oppositional thinking is relaxed or suspended. But please note: since this is just everyday life in the world, it is not ‘another reality.’”





# Wonderwork

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C. Magic as Education:  
Implication for the role of the magician?

“... if the modern magician is not going to simply imitate or parody the magician as miracle-worker and mystery-monger? Well, I say we can be *edifiers.*”

(Photo: Larry Heil, Magic & Meaning Conference)



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

Three points of view as options for living in the modern world:

- 1) *The Scientist – disenchantment*
- 2) *The Virtuoso – re-enchantment*
- 3) *The Edifier – wonderment*



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“The *scientist* does wonder, however constraining may be the rigors of the method.”



# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“The *virtuoso* does wonder also,  
but by adding another world.”





# Wonderwork

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## C. Magic as Education:

“But an *edifier* can elicit the breadth and depth of wonder without mystery.”



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

The role of the  
“magician-as-edifier”:

“Magic . . . should be performed  
to focus the gaze of the audience  
on their own wonder.”





# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

The role of the “magician-as-edifier”:  
“The goal is performances of magic that both remind the audience of the wonders they have experienced and initiate them into further possibilities of experiencing wonder.”



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

A challenge to the  
“magician-as-edifier”:

“Wonder performance  
requires full experience of  
wonder, mastery of magic  
technology, and a creative  
union of the wonder and magic.”





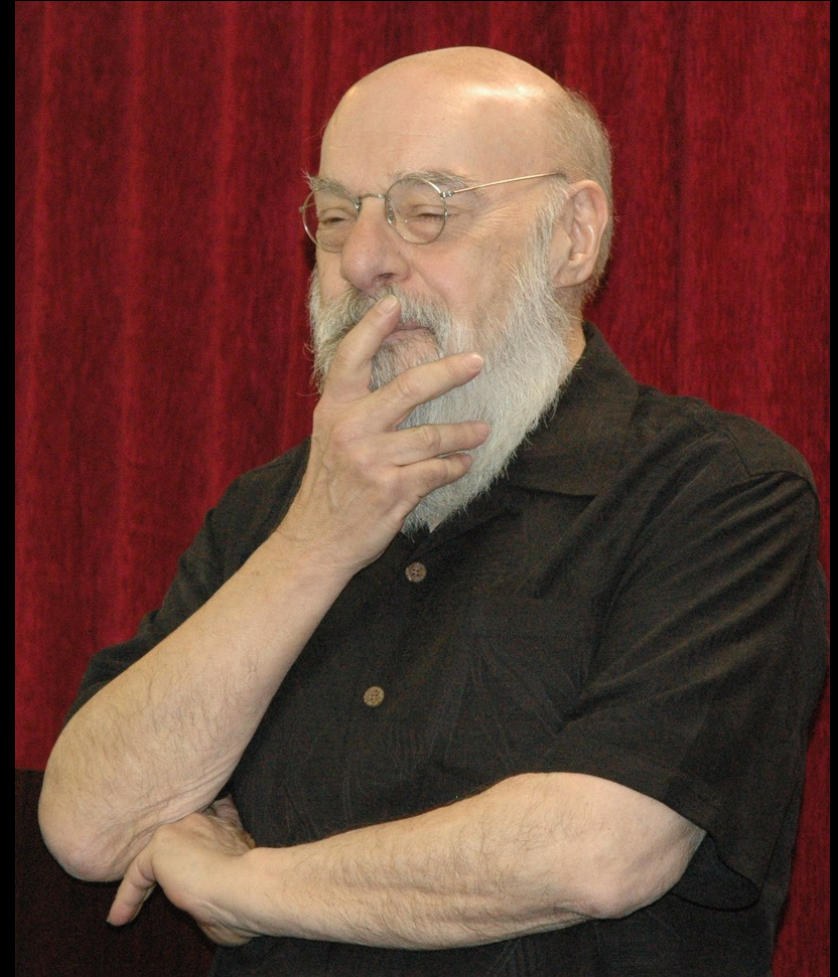
# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

A challenge to the  
“magician-as-edifier”:

“The goal is reached more  
by attitude than through  
intellectual suggestions.”



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

Several “pointers” that can appeal to the audience’s past experiences of wonder:



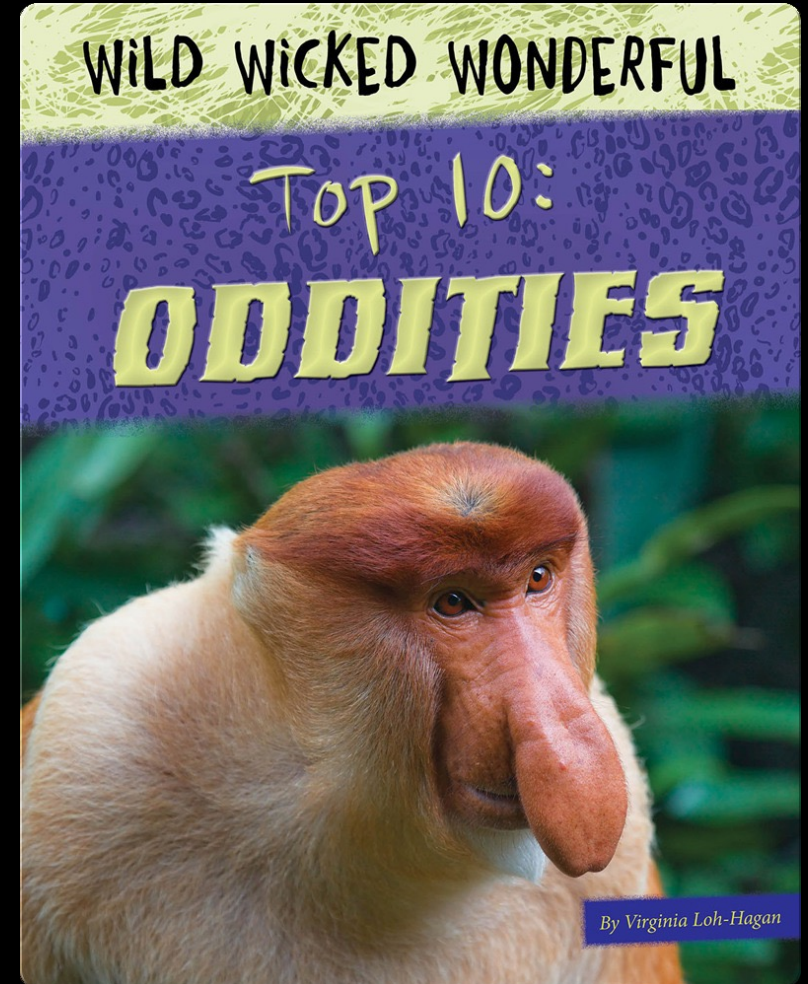
# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

- 1) The Uncommon –  
Our delight in novelty

Examples:  
folk notions, oddities, absurdly  
different (*National Inquirer*)





# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 2) The Common – The very familiar

Examples:

The identification of that which is:  
“A little honest wonder – a stone,  
a hill, a lake” . . . “An actual  
experience of meeting any object,  
any person, and event”





# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 3) Our Own Audience – The Challenge

“Audiences seem to expect tricks that dazzle and are suitable for children. This is how they have come to define magic. Presentations that lead them to wonder about themselves are not expected.”



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 3) Our Own Audience – The Challenge

Suggestions:

Choose tricks that relate to their shared concerns and interests: *sex, death, politics, and religion.*



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

4) Wonder Itself – (review the different stages, their elements, and their different outcomes)

### Suggestions:

Contrast this discussion with what we magicians tend to focus on.





# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 4) Wonder Itself –

Magicians tend to focus on “witness and shock” that feature “killer effects” and that “blow away” our audiences – exhibitions of our own “power.”



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 4) Wonder Itself –

An alternative:

Performances can focus on both the magician's power but also “empower others,” stressing the need to pass on the heritage to an apprentice.



# Wonderwork

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## D. Wonder Performance:

### 4) Wonder Itself –

An alternative goal: perform magic that “exhibits and inspires curiosity; shows and sponsors aesthetic elaboration in image, sound, movement, and story; and offers a celebration in which the admirations of performer and audience are remembered and shared.”





# Wonderwork

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## E. A Cautionary Wonder:

“There can be too much of a good thing. Wonder is not the only value, and it is at cross-purposes with other values such as stability, comfort, safety, satisfaction, and harmony.”



# Wonderwork

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## E. A Cautionary Wonder:

“Further, restoring, refreshing, and revitalizing the intimate link between magic and wonder is not without its own dangers such as the extremes of sentimental gushing and brutalizing dumbfoundedness.”



# Wonderwork

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## E. A Cautionary Wonder:

“Magic can be a creative assistant to wonder. But please note: this means that wonder is more fundamental than magic, and it is quite crucial to magic, as it is to so much else in our lives.”

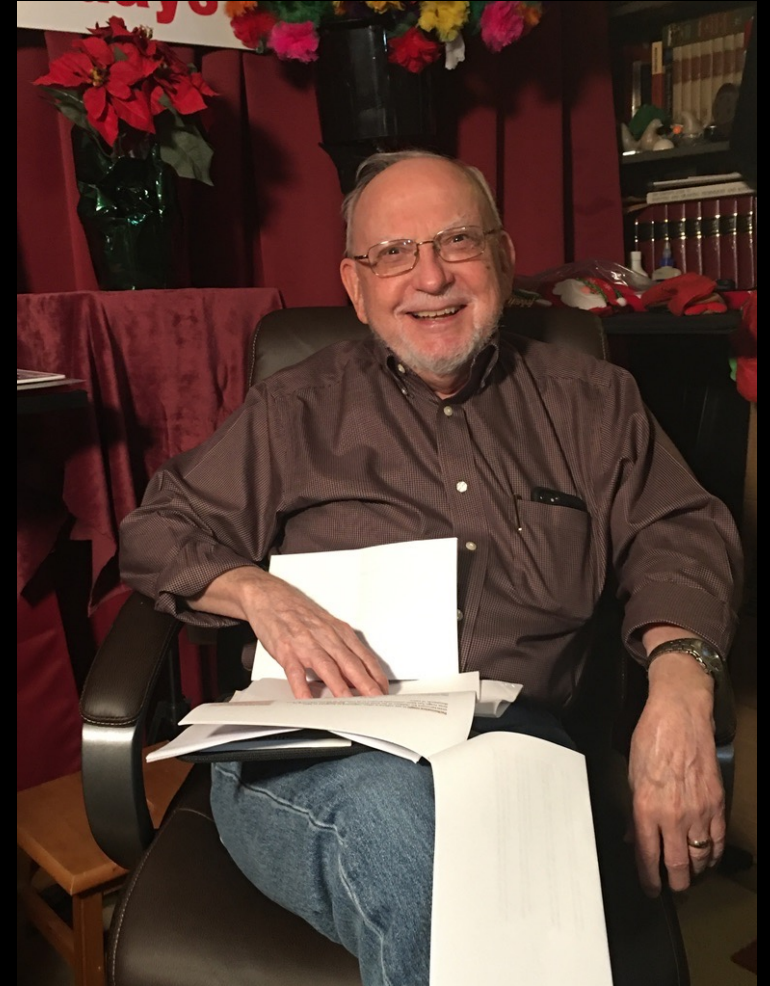


## Session 4: *Wonder*

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Looking ahead . . .

*The Magic of Celebrating Illusion*, the first volume in the Neale trilogy, is the focus of the fifth class on the major themes of Bob Neale's "general theory of magic."



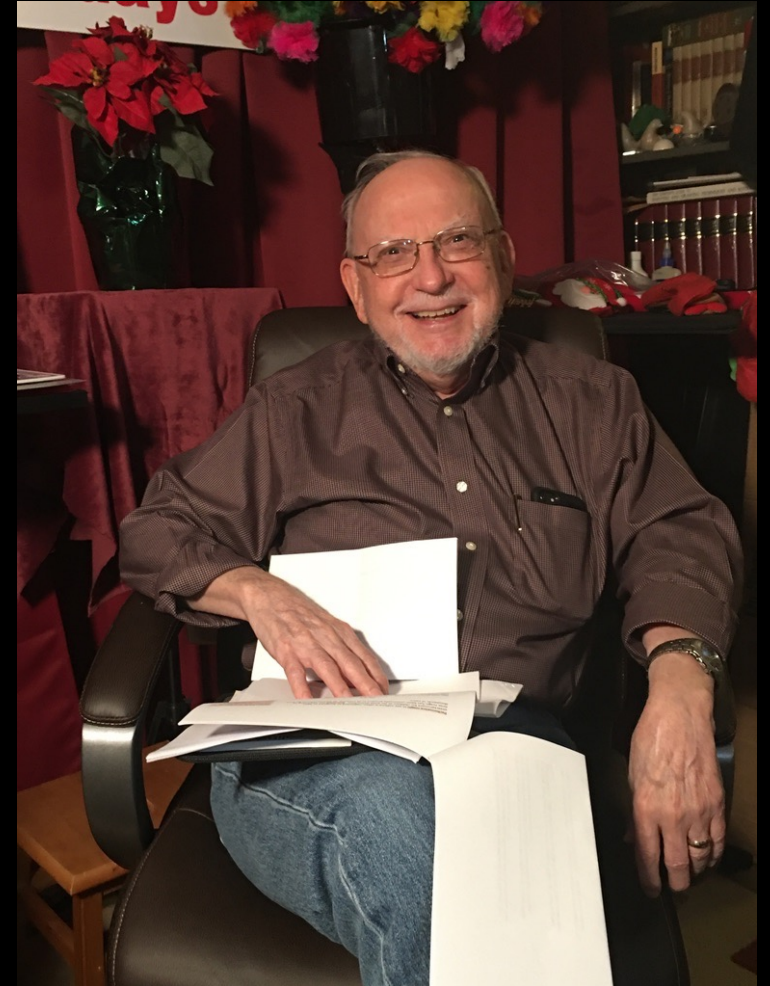


## Session 4: *Wonder*

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This book may be the most engaging of the volumes of the *Trilogy*, introducing four major illusions:

- 1) The Grand Optical Illusion
- 2) The Grand Psychological Illusion
- 3) The Grand Spiritual Illusion
- 4) The Grand Performance Illusion



# The Next Session:

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Check us out:

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The Website —

“Celebrating Illusions”

A Website Dedicated to the  
Magic of Robert E. Neale

[www.nealemagic.info](http://www.nealemagic.info)



Special thanks to Jeff and Abigail McBride for providing Bob Neale almost thirty years ago a safe space for him to play!

Consider becoming a member of what the BBC has described as "the world's most prestigious magic school."

Go to:

[www.magicalwisdom.com](http://www.magicalwisdom.com) and click on "Become a member"!



A very special thanks to

Dr. Robert “Bob” and Gail Neale for their encouragement and blessing for this workshop

Dr. Larry Hass, Dean, The McBride Magic and Mystery School, Publisher, *Theory and Art of Magic Press*, host of the “Index” and for all his support and encouragement.

David-Reed Brown, Instructor, The McBride Magic and Mystery School, whose inspiration and support has made this seminar series possible

And the friends of Bob Neale who have contributed to the recording and transmission of Bob’s work over the years.

