

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



Hosted by  
Michael Smith and Geoff Grimes

# Session 7: *Off Stage/On Stage Magic - Performance*

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

Play

The Trickster Spirit

Paul Pruyser’s Three World Perspective

The Imagination

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**Off-Stage/On-Stage Magic**

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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

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

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

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## Session 7: *Offstage/Onstage Magic*

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- 1) Onstage Magics
- 2) Offstage Magics



## *Onstage Magic*

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The gift of Onstage Magic:

“Stage magic can reflect the magic that occurs in daily life.”

“Magic is the mirror of magic.”



## *On-Stage Magic*

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Stage Magic as Theatrical —

“Stage magics are theatrical, staged to be something other than daily life, and something other as well from, say, the perspective of science.”



## *On-Stage Magic*

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Stage Magic as Theatrical —

“More specifically and importantly, the magic of the stage refers to all magic performance that plays with the reality of life magic in our lives. It *disbelieves* in what it is doing as anything other than a theatrical presentation.”

“The imagination is used to suggest, ‘What if magical thinking really worked?’”



# *Onstage Magic*

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## The Varieties of Onstage Magics —

- Distractive – amusement, spectacle
- Deceptive – trickster “fooler-doolers”
- Humanistic – themes of survival and pleasure
- Existential – quests for meaning
- Reflexive – “metamagic”



## *Onstage Magic*

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Onstage Magic as “Metamagic” —

“Metamagic” – the magic about magic

“When magic about magic is in full form, it creates an awareness of both offstage and onstage magics, of the dynamics underlying them, and of the unity of these dynamics.”

“Backstage, the magics are *one*.”





## *Onstage Magic*

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“Backstage Magic” as “Metamagic” —

“Metamagic can reflect on the magic that occurs in human relationships, politics and government, the arts, education, economics, even science, and especially medicine.”



## *Onstage Magic*

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“Backstage Magic” as “Metamagic” —

“It can also relate to the puzzles, illusions, deceptions, and ‘mysteries’ of the meaning of life as illustrated by traditional religions and contemporary approaches to ultimate concerns.”



## *Onstage Magic*

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“Backstage Magic” as “Metamagic” —

“Magical feeling, thinking, and acting appear in every realm of human behavior. So, too, does deception occur universally. The human animal is one of the few that can deceive, and it does so nearly without pause.”



## *Onstage Magic*

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“Backstage Magic” as “Metamagic” —

“So, metamagic is that most obvious form of backstage magic that openly and directly engages the audience in a reminder and education on magic in daily life.”



# *Offstage Magic*

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The Types of Offstage Magic:

- 1) Life magics
- 2) Traditional magics
- 3) Modern magic



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Life Magic – *What we do*

- Natural to human beings
- Universally practiced
- Difficult to see or accept



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Life Magic – *Examples*

- Gestures between parent and child
- The “healing touch”
- Use of the imagination to cure cancer
- Little “practices” we perform under stress
- Little rituals performed to enhance performances
- Love and hate magics



# *Offstage Magic*

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Life Magic – *Does it work?*

“Yes—it changes the psychology of the person performing it.”





# *Offstage Magic*

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Life Magic – *Does it work?*

“The real work and the basic benefits of primary life magic are faith, hope, and/or love.”



## *Offstage Magic*

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Life Magic – *Does it work?*

“When our lives seem pointless, without any future, and disconnected from everyone, we can become unable to function and even die. So, when faith, hope, and/or love are not available by other means, life magic can be beneficial.”



## *Offstage Magic*

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Traditional Magic – “What we do not do and what others do.”

“Why are we embarrassed by our own magic and devalue the magic of others?”

The answer: Who is practicing the magic?  
The whole community? The small group?  
The individual?



# *Offstage Magic*

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Traditional Magic –

- Ceremonial magic
- Individual magic
- Group Magic



# *Offstage Magic*

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Ceremonial Magic:  
The magico-religious behavior of  
indigenous people.



## *Offstage Magic*

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Community (Orthodox) Magic:  
Always good!

Community Magics and Individual Magics:  
Sometimes good, often “bad” (as it works  
against the community, called “black  
magic”)



# *Offstage Magic*

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## George Vetter's Seven-Stage "History of Reactions to Magic"

- 1) Magic practiced by indigenous people
- 2) Magic as a foreign practice
- 3) Magic distinguished from religion
- 4) Division of magic into "white" and "black"



# *Offstage Magic*

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## George Vetter's Seven-Stage "History of Reactions to Magic"

- 5) Magic as the budding concepts of science
- Religion - what we believe
  - Science – what we know
  - Magic – whatever else went on





# *Offstage Magic*

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George Vetter's Seven-Stage "History of Reactions to Magic"

6) Magic as false, hence, non-efficacious  
Religion as true, hence, efficacious



## *Offstage Magic*

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George Vetter's Seven-Stage "History of Reactions to Magic"

7) Both religion and magic denied any instrumental value



# *Offstage Magic*

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Modern Magic – Daniel O’Keefe’s Basic  
Institutions of Magic:

- 1) Medical
- 2) Black
- 3) Ceremonial
- 4) Religious
- 5) Occult
- 6) Paranormal
- 7) Sectarian



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Modern Magic – Neale's Classification

- 1) Superstition – magic without embeddedness, detached from what the individual finds most meaningful
- 2) Superstition – preliminary idiosyncratic mannerisms of actors, athletes, gamblers, and others before performances



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Modern Magic – Neale’s Classification

2) Occult “sciences” and “theosophies” –  
derived from magic medicine and  
divination systems



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Modern Magic – Neale’s Classification

- 3) The Paranormal
- 4) Magic cults and sects
- 5) The “unexplored magics”



## *Offstage Magic*

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Closing observation:

“To the extent that our society surrounds us with machines, bureaucracies, technologies, and planning systems that, however well they achieve their functional purposes, remain unfathomable to us and underscore our sense of helplessness, magic offers the possibility of creative reaction.”



# *Offstage Magic*

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## Modern Magic

Community Magics and Individual Magics:  
Sometimes good, often “bad” (as it works  
against the community, called “black  
magic”)





# *Performance*

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Neale offers a number of suggestions for making “offstage” magic more meaningful and empathetic with magic that are natural to audiences.



# *Performance*

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Preconditions for Magical Performance:

- 1) Desire – when one feels one has to do something
  - 2) Uncertainty – but can't do it
- Strong desire and uncertainty prompt magic.



# *Performance*

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Preconditions for Magical Performance:

3) Imagination –

“I believe that the magical use of the imagination by adults under conditions of desire and uncertainty is a kind of performance. An embodied activity informed by imaginative make-believe, the magic perspective is theater, a drama played by the individual for himself or for his community as well.”



# *Performance*

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Purpose/Function of Stage Magical Performance:

- 1) Reduced Stage Magics
  - a) Distractive – without any motivation other than distraction from everyday life
  - b) Deceptive – without any motivation other than fooling people



# *Performance*

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Purpose/Function of Stage Magical  
Performance:

2) Restored Stage Magics

a) Humanistic – relates to common  
human concerns



# *Performance*

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Purpose/Function of Stage Magical Performance:

2) Restored Stage Magics

b) Existential – to make sense/  
meaning of the world, events and  
ourselves

- Religious & Gospel Magic –  
institutional; belief vs. disbelief
- Bizarre Magic – presentation of  
the “awful” side of existence



# *Performance*

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Purpose/Function of Stage Magical Performance:

- 3) Reflexive Magics – magic about magic; occurring in places not expected
  - a) sucker tricks
  - b) Exposing spiritualists, psychics, and healers
  - c) Gambling displays



# *Performance*

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Purpose/Function of Stage Magical  
Performance:

4) Onstage Magic as a Mirror/  
Reflection of Offstage Magic





# *Performance*

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“I believe that stage magic is best considered a handmaiden. It occurs most powerfully when in the service of something other than itself. Magic by and for itself is next to nothing, a momentary diversion from daily life, whereas magic as an adjunct is more impressive and lasting; and an influence on daily life.”



# *Performance*

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“The play is the thing/wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king.”

(Hamlet, II,) ii)

“And so I propose: ‘the magic’s the thing wherein we catch the self-consciousness of the audience in our mutual pursuit of the ‘Minotaur’ called ‘truth.’”



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## Session 8: “Psychological Classification of Magic”

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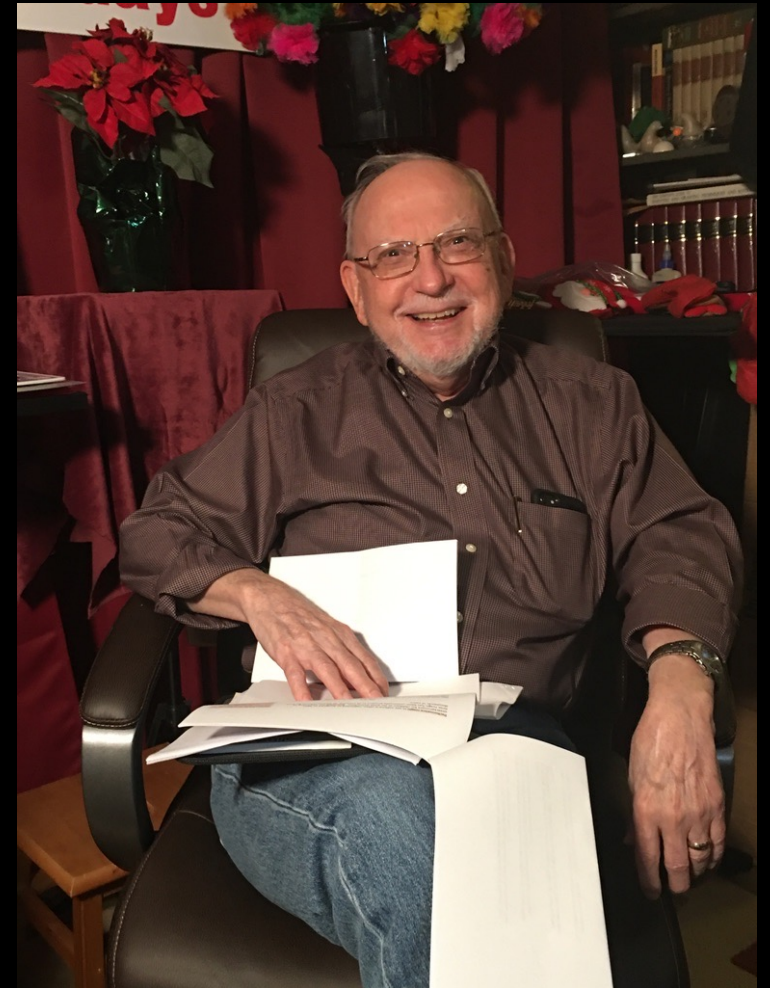


## Session 8: Looking ahead . . . (Mike)

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Doctor Mike's questions for homework:

Rather than considering the selection of your tricks from a “physical,” “technological,” “social,” or “outcome” approach, think with Bob about selecting your routines from the perspectives of “being,” “doing,” or “relating.”



# The Backstory for this Workshop:

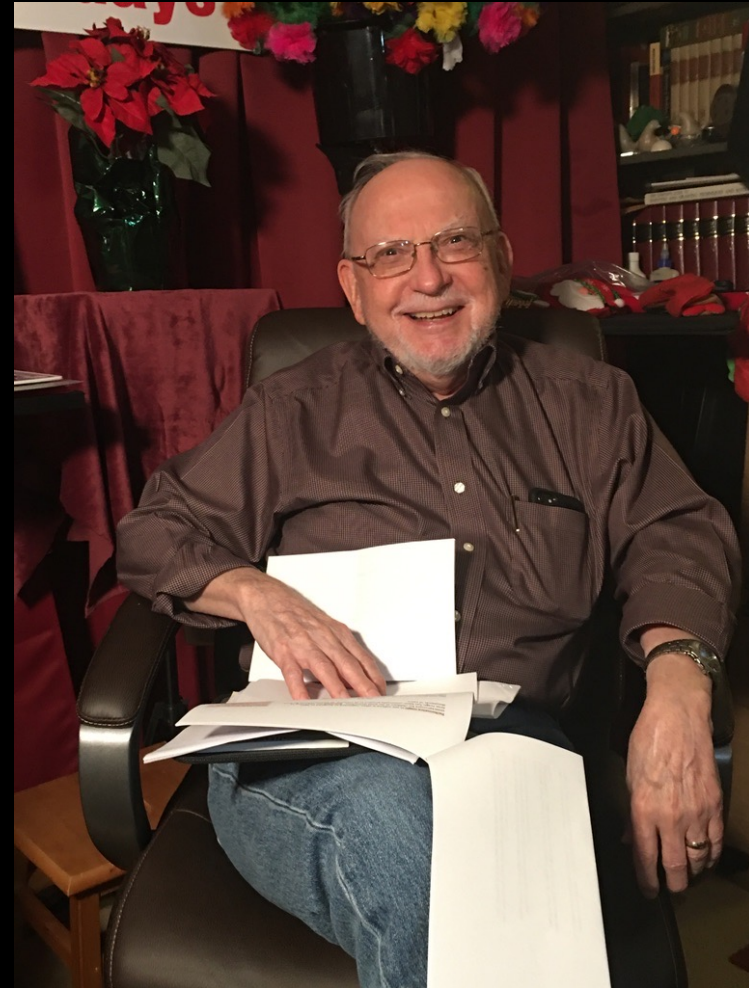
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Personal discussions in DeSoto

Identification of “themes”

Magic & Meaning Conferences,  
*McBride Magic & Mystery School*  
Las Vegas

PEPTalk Presentations



# The Backstory for this Workshop:

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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 their inspiration for our study of Bob Neale and to Larry Hass, Bob's editor and publisher -

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