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# Performing Fabulous Monsters: re-inventing the gothic personae in bizarre magick.

## *Bizarre Magick*

Performance magic research has primarily focussed on historical studies of the nineteenth century's 'golden age'.<sup>1</sup> Subsequently, performance magic has been largely neglected by the academy. This is due to the misconception that performance magic ended as a cultural entertainment with the birth of cinema. In reality, performance magic found ways to inhabit and energise both film and TV, just as it is now inhabiting and innovating new media. The contemporary 'magic assemblage' (During, 2002) now rivals that of the golden age in terms of popularity and overshadows it both in invention and in its astonishing scope.

Performance magic takes many forms and this chapter will examine the particular genre of bizarre magick, which favours theatrical character, storytelling, overt allegory, symbolism, and themes of the supernatural, fantastic, and weird. Having roots in Victorian *spirit* performance, e.g. the Davenport Brothers (1854-77), and the early 20th century performances of Theodore Annemann (1907-42) and Stewart James (1908-96), it realised itself as a movement in the 1970s through a counter-cultural reaction against the big boxes and card flourishes of a *disenchanted* contemporary mainstream stage magic. Bizarre magicians sought to *re-enchanted* performance magic with the mysterious and the spiritual, (re)discovering its deeper meaning.

Evidence of this attempt at re-enchancement can be seen in the term 'bizarre magick' with practitioners often adding the 'k' to signal a connection with a spelling convention initiated by Aleister Crowley, itself an attempt to differentiate performance magic from occult practice. This spelling was popularised in the 1970s by contributors to the influential magazine *Invocation* (Andruzzi & Raven, 2007). However, it was primarily the British bizarrists Charles Cameron and Tony 'Doc' Shiels who were directly influenced by Western occultism, Celtic mythology and ceremonial magic. Throughout this chapter we have used the convention of the 'k' spelling not to suggest that bizarre

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<sup>1</sup> An interest perpetuated by books such as *Hiding the Elephant* (Steinmeyer, 2003) & films such as *The Prestige* (2006) and *The Illusionist* (2006)

magick always has strong links to these traditions but simply to distinguish it from other forms of performance magic.

### ***Fabulous Monsters***

Max Maven is one of the pre-eminent performers of magic (with and without the 'k') working today and this chapter draws its name from a 2006 documentary about Maven (Zuckerbrot, 2006) in which he recalls a story from the book *Harpo Speaks* (Marx, 1985). This biography of Harpo Marx also tells the story of Alexander Woollcott, who, on the verge of adolescence, attended a birthday party and was required to participate in a 'curious activity', a game where each child was asked to write down what they wanted to be when they grew up.

As we can assume, very few of them grew up to be what they had inscribed on their slips of paper. However, this was not true for young Alexander Woollcott, who would eventually become exactly what he had written down. On his paper, he had inscribed these words – "I would rather be a **fabulous monster.**" Max Maven (Zuckerbrot, 2006).

This chapter explores the relationship of bizarre magick to the Gothic through notions of the *fabulous* and the *monstrous*. Maven influenced by Woollcott's words chose to become a fabulous monster himself. He made a decision to create this new character/persona early on in his career. He was born Philip Goldstein and adopted the name Max 'as it was a crisp dynamic name that had fallen out of fashion', the x being 'sharp and distinctive' coupled with *Maven*, a 'Yiddish word for a wise expert or a know-it-all; the name contains many clues to Max's identity and background.' (Steinmeyer 2007, p.57). Maven then transformed himself,

[...]with extreme, theatrical grooming: a deep widow's peak, burnished black hair, sharp eyebrows and dark eye shadow, a Mephistophelean goatee, and a pierced ear. He looked like Ming the Merciless from the old Flash Gordon Comics. (Steinmeyer, 2007, p.57).

Claiming to have been born on 'the day with most darkness' (Zuckerbrot, 2006), Maven's look references Ming the Merciless (Zuckerbrot, 2006) and Kabuki theatre while his personality mixes intellectual supremacy, dry wit and arch comedy. He

contrasts a visually cartoonish image with unashamedly intellectual and eclectic scripts. He is a stylish monster who speaks fluent Japanese and quotes theoretical physicist Wolfgang Pauli. Maven's trademark opening line plays with the idea of a self-aware monster. He strides onstage, leans in to the microphone, smiles, and quietly says, 'Boo!' This immediately plays with the audience's expectations; by taking himself lightly, he is in fact taking himself seriously. The monstrous is fabulous and his persona becomes, 'the first effect in [the] show' (Steinmeyer, 2007, p.57).

Maven's attention to persona is mirrored in the bizarre magick literature. Just what manner of persona should the bizarrist adopt? While the idea of the magician developing a dramatic persona is not new, the bizarrist draws on elements largely rejected by the magic establishment. Bizarre magick rejects the notion of the traditional 'bourgeois magician' (Saville, 2004) while favouring storytelling, the uncanny and the Gothic.

A frequently quoted precept of modern magic is Eugene Robert-Houdin's words; 'A magician is an actor playing the part of a magician' (Robert-Houdin & Hoffmann, 1878, p.43). T.A. Waters interprets this to mean 'a stage magician is an actor playing the part of a **real** magician' advising the would be bizarrist to 'act as yourself, perhaps sceptical but curious; there are these rituals you know about, they're probably just superstition, but why not give them a try and see if anything happens?' thus the performer takes the approach of an 'interested student rather than omnipotent master' (Waters, 1993, p.243-4).

Tony Raven advises that the magician should not appear like a character out of a grade B horror movie but rather play the part of a man demonstrating what he knows about the occult sciences. He argues that it is far too easy for a character to be seen as a 'corny simulation of a man of mystery' and 'much easier and more credible' approach to developing a character is to play the 'role of savant, one who has interest in the occult and is willing to experiment with his discoveries as entertainment for his audience.' Tony Andruzzi has called this 'the Van Helsing Approach'<sup>2</sup> (Magus, 2009, p.17), where Van Helsing is portrayed as 'one who may, or may not, know what he is

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<sup>2</sup> Here Tony Andruzzi is referring both to the novel *and* to the various screen portrayals, particularly in the British *Dracula* films of the 1960s and 70s which featured actors Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing.

doing! Van Helsing here leads us into areas that perhaps he can't handle, that he perhaps cannot control. We are led to the **edge** of credibility.' (Burger, 1991, p.35).

In adopting a persona the bizarre magician balances the real and the imaginary, the received truth and the actual truth. The magician is often portrayed as an ordinary man whose power comes from a study of the occult and supernatural. His power is derived from, 'secret, and conventionally rejected knowledge' (Burger, 1991, p.35) and although being associated with the dark arts he is often on the side of good.

Within the diversity of these characters we can see a 'spectrum' (Magus, 2009, p.20) of persona and performance technique based upon the practitioner's intention to produce *hard* or *soft*, *monstrous* or *fabulous* bizarre. The examples which follow illustrate this spectrum and demonstrate a series of conscious decisions by the performer based on dramatic intent; this may involve directly using names and characters from the Gothic, borrowing recognisable elements of the genre for their characterisation and performance, and even, in the case of 'hard' bizarre, performing magic as *real*.

### ***From Dracula to Van Helsing***

A number of bizarre magicians develop characters that make direct reference to the Gothic within their work. Here we can ask questions as to just which elements of the Gothic genre is the performer adopting. It would be difficult to perform a Dracula character as a magician and stay wholly true to Bram Stoker's vision, and pragmatic concessions are made. These personas are often a jigsaw of the canonical Gothic elements that make up the entire Dracula oeuvre often having more in common with *Dracula*, *Dead and Loving It* (1995) or *The Munsters* (1964-1966) than with the original novel or the film *Nosferatu* (1922).

### ***Charles Cameron***

Charles Cameron a key originator of the genre was a psychic investigator and performer well known for his *Friday Frighteners* and *Beyond the Unknown* radio shows. Cameron was curator of the Edinburgh Wax Museum from its inception in 1976 until it closed in 1989. Here he created the *Nights of Fear* and, in the final years of its existence, *Castle Dracula*, a theatre devoted to bizarre magick and inspired by Maskeylene's

famous Egyptian Hall in London. Cameron produced and took the lead part of Count Dracula, other performers played Daemon; 'a creature from the depths of Hell', and the Vampiress.

In *Castle Dracula Mentalism* (1997) Cameron describes a number of the routines he performed. They read quite differently from other bizarre magick effects that draw influence from Gothic tales. They are very straightforward and have little serious dark symbolism attached to them, reflecting the stage show itself, which played out the Gothic in a rather tongue-in-cheek manner, comparable to popular Gothic horror themed television shows. For example, In *The Book of Demons* (Cameron, 1997, p.19), a page from a book of horror tales is chosen by an audience volunteer. The page is torn from the book and marked with the outline of a human figure. While the page is held outstretched by the volunteer, the performer 'holds a needle aloft and suddenly plunges it down on to the page.' The volunteer holds the page up to the light and sees that there is a hole through the 'O' in the word forbidden. The volunteer then tears the page into quarters and the performer burns it. When they re-examine the book the volunteer discovers that the torn out page has returned. The edges of the page are slightly singed and charred. The outline of a figure is drawn on the page and there is a pinhole through the letter 'O' in the word *forbidden*. The volunteer takes the book home as a souvenir.

### ***Eugene Burger***

Named as 'One of the 100 most influential magicians of the 20th century' by Magic Magazine Burger is also a philosopher and historian of religion with advanced degrees in Divinity (Yale University) and philosophy, and has taught comparative religion and philosophy. This background is apparent in his writing and performance. He argues that in the past magic, death, life and art were mixed, but that today's magic has been reduced to tricks and tamed into the superfluous. Today's magic should be about 'fabricating reality to produce surprising results' (Caplan, 1988). Burger's work emphasises the importance of the structuring of deception, this frequently consists of considered storytelling, focusing on mystery and bizarre as opposed to 'tricks'.

Eugene Burger in his introduction to *The Compleat Invocation* (Andruzzi & Raven, 2007) states that the publication should stand 'as a reminder to magicians that there is an older magic, a deeper and perhaps even darker tradition that has quietly spread

underground for centuries' an older magic that 'stretches back in time and history far beyond the point where written records begin.' (Eugene Burger in Andruzzi & Raven, 2007). In contrast to the treatment of bizarre magick as a playful form of light-hearted Gothic entertainment, the concept of the magician here is more closely related to that of that magus, with professional, ceremonial, ritualistic and spiritual duties. (Butler, 1948) However, this serious concern with the deeper meanings of magic does not mean that Burger's performing style is always serious. On the contrary, his routines are often mischievously humorous and his style influenced by the cinematic Gothic. Stating that if he had a style, 'I think I got it watching Bela Lugosi and Boris Karloff movies when I was young.' (Burger, 2007)

In 1992 Eugene Burger and fellow magician Jeff McBride founded *The Mystery School* as a way of exploring new contexts for magic. McBride describes the School as, 'not only an experiential retreat, but also a piece of living art, an adventure in theatre.' (Burger & McBride, 2003, p. 17). The intention was to create, 'interactive magical experiences for magicians.' (*ibid*). Again, there was serious intent but also humour, as Burger says, 'yes, we're serious about this but, well, we're not serious, we're sincere.' (*ibid*, p.31) Mystery School alumni, such as David Parr, see magic as fundamental to a human culture where, 'the world of magic is not so separate from everyday reality', stating that 'the sciences grew from magic', 'alchemy gave rise to chemistry, astrology to astronomy. Magic is present in our religious and spiritual beliefs, it's in our myths and folklore, it's in our entertainment. And it's in our daily behavior' (Parr 2002)

Magical thinking may be a part of our everyday lives, but to explore the potential of the magical through The Mystery School requires a more sustained mode of thought; 'not to believe or disbelieve in magic, but just to make believe magic was real, not in the childish sense, but in the very aware adult sense' (Burger & McBride, 2003, p.34). Some bizarrists have taken the mixing of performance and *real* magic further, choosing to pursue the bizarre 24/7 and developing a reputation for being the trickster playing with the real and the imaginary. Here we see an imperative based upon ambiguity within the performance and, while still drawing on the Gothic, Doc Shiels and Tony Andruzzi blur the edge between magic as performance and magic as lived reality.

### **Tony 'Doc' Shiels**

Like many other bizarrists, Shiels has drawn from Gothic media to construct a performance persona. Shiels was heavily influenced by a number of characters; W.C. Fields 'the quintessential snake-oil pitch-man'; Werner Krauss 'in *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari*'; 'Mr Dark from Ray Bradbury's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*' along with 'a dash of this and a sprinkle of that until the figure evolved' (Shiels, 198, p.31) Shiels refers to being a magician 24/7 and adopting a media-savvy persona to exploit the role of magician and come across as real. Having decided that 'magic could benefit from a strong injection of the stuff which curdles blood and causes nightmares' (Caplan, 1988) he began introducing himself as a 'cantrip-casting shamanic surrealchemist' (Shiels, 1988b, p.12). To Shiels, the artfully constructed hoax, such as his photographs of monsters - including, Morgawr (a Cornish sea monster) and his now famous photograph of the Loch Ness monster taken during his 1977 'monster hunt', are a valid a form of performance. Shiels extends Waters' concept of the *real* magician by arguing that the magician must not, simply, appear as an actor playing the part of a magician but must, 'BE an awesomely and demonstrably *real* cantrip casting magician', with the magician's experiments making the audience feel like they could be in some form of danger. (Shiels, 1988b, p.19).

### **Tony Andruzzi**

Tony Andruzzi presents a darker view of the bizarre persona, appearing as sophisticated Mephistopheles, occultist, and edgy trickster. From 1981 until his death in 1991 he was editor of the seminal bizarre magick magazine *New Invocation* (Andruzzi & Raven, 2007). A preeminent founder, contributor and a revered name in the community of bizarre magicians, his primary bizarre magick persona was Masklyn ye Mage, a 'psycho-dynamic experimentalist' (Shiels, 1988b, p.12).

Eugene Burger identifies three central ideas to Andruzzi's work;

The first is the idea that one must be a magician 24 hours a day; the second is that the impact of a bizarre magick performance decreases as the size of the audience increases; and the third is that Tony did not seek laughter or applause from his audience, his objective was to shake up our sense of reality. (Burger & Parr, 2000).



Andruzzi's work has not been without criticism and even today his ethical stance provokes debate (Swiss *et al.*, 2009). He often encouraged magicians to do psychic readings and to 'present themselves to the gullible, who are suffering, as one who has real powers that can help them with the problems in their personal lives.' (Burger & Parr, 2000).

Though they would have ethical issues with Andruzzi's use of the word 'gullible' there are many magicians today who see helping people as a part of their art. This may simply be a belief that magic is, as Max Maven has said, 'about reminding us, first and foremost, that there is mystery.' (Cherniak, 1994) but there are also practicing therapists who have written about how they introduce magic into therapy (Cushman, 2008; Inglee in Burger & McBride, 2003, p.257). This complex debate aside, Andruzzi's magick was deliberately disturbing uncomfortable, leaving the 'impression that there really are deep mysteries in the world' (Burger & Parr, 2000). In bizarre magick these mysteries are often explored through the telling of stories.

### ***Bizarre Storytelling***

Alongside the development of character/persona, attention to the importance of story is another key feature that distinguishes bizarre magick from other styles of performance magic. Burger suggests that the ancient tradition of using stories in conjuring performances has been trivialized by the childish stories used by contemporary magicians;

'These early stories were serious vehicles, whose telling evoked important truths for our ancient ancestors. It took magicians' stories thousands of years to get to Billy Bunter, the Hippity-hop Rabbits, and Joanne the Duck.' (Burger in Neale, 1991, p.vii)

Neale goes on to state, that in most magic, 'the presentation of a plot - that is, the physical event in a card trick, such as a transposition or vanish - usually amounts to communicating the events of the plot clearly.' He argues that this is 'highly abstract and seemingly removed from all human concerns.' He compares such presentations to mathematics and while such presentations can be enjoyable, there are many other approaches. Neale concludes; 'A presentation can point to matters beyond the plot.' (Neale, 2000, p.x).

Storytelling magic uses the magic effects to point to other things and is fundamentally a symbolic form that is often allegorical in practice. In this sense it is closely related to gospel magic, which uses magic effects as a way of telling religious parable. Bizarre magic can also concern itself with matters of a spiritual nature and has been called, 'Gospel magic turned inside out'. (Burger, 1991, p.14-15) As the game of magic plays with the participant's concepts of truth, belief, illusion and the impossible it lends itself to the service of stories with similar themes to that of gospel magic. Neale refers to this as 'reflexive magic' (Burger & Neale, 1995, p.187), magic that is about magic and which can refer to 'deception in all areas of life' (ibid). The magic assemblage presents a complex series of reflections, mirrors, and meta-narratives that interpret and reinterpret the various rhetorics of magic. Within this, bizarre magick offers numerous examples of transformations/translations of classic and contemporary Gothic rhetorics of the magical.

Shiels, describes the bizarrist approach to adapting stories from other media in its taste for the Gothic, noting that while 'bizarre magick steals plots from films and books' it is also familiar with 'dusty grimoires and books of shadows, with the learned tomes of occult philosophy [...] it is a force to be reckoned with.(Shiels, 1988a, p.41)

To understand quite how great the bizarrist's taste for adapting Gothic stories was we only need to consider that the 35-page booklet *And Then There Were Three* (Shiels *et al*, 1974) contained the following examples of bizarre effects all directly inspired by Gothic fiction: Tony Raven's *The Great God Pan*, based on Machen's *The Great God Pan* (1894) and *The White People* (1904); Roy Fromer's *The Black Seal* is based on Machen's *The Novel of the Black Seal* (1895); Tony Raven's *The Mysterious Card* is based on Cleveland Moffet's tale of the same name (1896); and Roy Fromer's *The Yellow Sign* is based on Robert W. Chambers' *The King in Yellow* (1895). Shiels has also created a number of effects inspired by ghost story author M. R. James including *Fleshcreeper* (Shiels, 1967, p.21) and *Who is this who is coming?* (Shiels, 1981, p.49), both inspired by 'Oh, Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad'. His *Casting the Runes* (Shiels, 1988a, p.46) is named after the James story and inspired by the Jacques Tourneur film adaptation *Night of the Demon* (1957).

His effect *Black Christmas* (Shiels, 1988a, p.41) was inspired by the following passage from the James essay, *Stories I Have Tried to Write*.

There may be possibilities, too, in the Christmas cracker, if the right people pull it, and if the motto which they find inside has the right message on it. They will probably leave the party early, pleading indisposition; but very likely a "Previous engagement of long standing," would be the more truthful excuse. (James, 1987, p.360)

*Black Christmas* is written for performance at a Christmas party hosted by the magician. A number of different coloured counters are shown and placed into a velvet bag. The guests each secretly choose a counter and the magician is blindfolded and spun around while a rhyme is chanted. The blindfolded magician points his finger and the guest is selected (for this example we shall call him John and add that he is with his wife Alison) loans the magician a five pound note. The serial number of the note is written down and the magician tears off a corner for John to keep. The rest of the note is folded into a handkerchief and, with the guests in a circle, the magician chants,

"Yuletide... Midwinter... is a dark, strange and magical time. The Winter Solstice, Saturnalia, governed by the King of Chaos, the Lord of Misrule, to whom an offering must be made. Our good friend, John, has freely volunteered to sacrifice something he loves dearly... Alison..." Short pause for effect. "Alison will, as I am sure she has many times before, help John wave farewell to his money." (Shiels, 1988a, p.43)

John waves goodbye to his money, which is then shown to have vanished from the handkerchief. However, we find that John has chosen a black counter and is directed to pick a cracker of the same colour from underneath the tree and to pull it with Alison. Inside they find his five pound note, which matches the piece he has kept, and a piece of parchment on which is written,

"Here's luck to John and Alison,  
On this special night of Yule,  
It's rare to get your money back,  
From the dark Lord of misrule." (Shiels, 1988a, p.44)

*Black Christmas*, like many other bizarre magick pieces, follows Andruzzi's advice that the impact of a performance decreases as the size of the audience increases, and is

written for an intimate gathering of friends and pays particular attention to the personal relationships of the guests (in this case a couple). The piece also borrows from other James sources including *The Mezzotint* and *Oh Whistle, and I'll Come to You, My Lad* as well as changing the payoff from something sinister in the James' original suggestion to a form of friendly Christmas gift.

Andruzzi has described a bizarrist as someone who takes the special effects from horror movies and presents them in the living room (Shiels, 1988a). In this vein, bizarrists have adapted H. P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos, in part because it allows them have fun creating special effects from seafood - Kate Shiels' *Vermicularis* (Shiels, 1988a, p.70), which is in turn based on Brother Shadow's *Robin's Quest* (Andruzzi, 2007, No.32, p.379), requires the construction of a hybrid creature from a squid and an octopus tentacle, while Tony Andruzzi's *Temple of Cthulhu* (Andruzzi, 1977) utilizes a shelled oyster stained with blue-green food colouring. However, the peak of Lovecraftian bizarre magick is Stephen Minch's *Lovecraftian Ceremonies* (1979), a book of seven bizarre magick routines based on Lovecraft's tales.; a key example being *The Stigmata of Cthulhu*, where the 'Mark of Cthulhu' is drawn on to parchment while the magician chants a spell accompanied by the sound of bubbling water gradually increasing in volume. Finally, one spectator collapses, the parchment vanishes in a burst of flame and spectators find the Mark has appeared in various places on their bodies. (Minch, 1979)

Shiels then suggests that, 'The magician has a powerful advantage over the story-teller in that he can, through trickery, make that "something" apparently happen to his audience.' (Shiels, 1981, p.58). Shiels quotes M. R. James as saying that, 'The reader of a ghost story must be put into the position of thinking to himself, "If I'm not careful, something of this sort may happen to me.'" We see this philosophy in *Jack-in-the-Box* (Shiels, 1988a, p.78), where the performer introduces a brightly decorated box, about six inches square and securely padlocked, explaining that it is a rare type of *Jack-in-the-Box* created in the eighteenth century by the 'eccentric mechanical genius', Jacobus Lathrop-Pinchbeck. The box appears to be moving slightly. The performer carefully unlocks the box and steps back as if expecting the lid to fly open but it remains closed. He leans forward and lifts the lid but still nothing happens. He peeps inside the box - "Come on, Jack, there's a good fellow..." - and reaches inside.

Suddenly the room is plunged into complete darkness. There is a clattering and a shrill squealing sound, a cry of pain and the smell of sulphur. The lights come back on. "The box is on its side, empty, except for a few strands of damp straw, and a tiny round brass bell of the type worn on a jester's cap." The back of the performers hand is marked with the impression of teeth, and miniature, hook-nosed, mask of "an evil puppet Punch" is found in the fireplace.

Shiels acknowledges that the inspiration for this routine came from Fritz Lieber's *The Power of the Puppets* (1942) and the episode in the movie *Cats Eye* (1985) where the murderous little hobgoblin - in a jester's cap - is thwarted by a protective feline. Bizarrists may not be able to compete with the special effects of the horror film but *Jack-in-the-Box* is a fine example of how suggestion and intimacy can be used to generate unease and even terror in an audience.

### ***Bizarre Influence***

While bizarre magick was initially an underground reaction to mainstream magic it continues to influence the mainstream with performers such as Penn and Teller, Criss Angel and Derren Brown all borrowing elements of this genre. The most successful contemporary performers are working with a wide range of styles but the influence of bizarre magick can be seen in their work in the use of story, the development of character, and an appreciation of the fundamentally bizarre nature of all magic performance. As Burger says, 'Could anything be more bizarre than finding a rabbit in someone's hat, or cutting an assistant to pieces with a lumber saw to the rhythm of cha-cha music?' (Burger & Neale, 1995, p.7).

An example of a contemporary, mainstream performance of bizarre magick can be seen from Derren Brown in his TV series *Trick or Treat* (2007). The ventriloquist's dummy has been the subject of a number of cinematic Gothic tales including *The Great Gabbo* (1929), *The Devil Doll* (1964), and *Magic* (1978). One of the tales from the portmanteau horror film *Dead of Night* (1942) also concerns a ventriloquist's dummy and was loosely based on Gerald Kersh's *The Extraordinarily Horrible Dummy* (1939). In the final scene between the ventriloquist, Maxwell Frere, and his rival, Sylvester Kee, Frere speaks in the voice of his dummy Hugo, "Why, hello, Sylvester, I've been waiting for you." The personalities of the ventriloquist and his dummy are inverted. The voice

and the movement of Frere's lips do not match and we experience an intense moment of the 'vocalic uncanny'. (Connor, 2000, p.412)

Derren Brown and co-writer Andy Nyman<sup>3</sup> created *Ventriloquist Doll* in homage to this scene from *Dead of Night*. A moment of the vocalic uncanny is created when the psyche of Mr Miggs, a ventriloquist's dummy seems to inhabit Andy, an audience volunteer. Mr Miggs is a mind reading dummy and Andy is asked to think of something bad he has done in the past. Andy stares into the eyes of Mr Miggs and they both start moving their lips. The voice of Mr Miggs describes the bad thing that Andy is thinking of but it is Andy who is doing the talking. This is an original twist on the concept of mind reading. If Andy is simply answering his own question then why is this mind-reading? If Mr Miggs is speaking through Andy's mouth then is he inside Andy's head? Mr Miggs is placed inside the suitcase from which he was originally taken but he continues to speak through Andy, "No! Lemme out. Can't see anything." The routine ends and the credits roll with Andy still speaking, disoriented, sightless and alone on the stage.

## **Conclusion**

As contemporary performance magic has been largely untouched by academic theory we may ask what kinds of theory can help us to understand such an art? This question is a large one and it is not within the scope of this chapter to suggest an answer, however, we will make some observations about the use of the Gothic in bizarre Magic as a small step to beginning the debate.

There is a tension between narratology and ludology in any attempt to theorize performance magic. A magic performance, especially one of bizarre magick, is clearly a text and can be considered as such but it is also a performance in which a game is played between the performer and the audience. As a form of play, performance magic may be analysed in terms of physical stimulus and social interaction. Indeed in many magic performances the notion of an audience, with its connotation of passive spectation, is called into question. Audience members can become helper, volunteer, guest, performer, querant, stooge, or sucker - all active roles for players in the game of

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<sup>3</sup> Nyman is also a self-confessed horror movie fan who has named one of his marketed effects *Dead of Night*

magic. If magic can be seen as a kind of game then the bizarre Magician takes the role of the dungeon master, guiding both the play and the narrative.

The narratology/ludology tension is particularly evident in the writings of Robert Neale, a retired professor of the psychology of religion and philosophy who has created many examples of storytelling magic and written extensively on the meaning of magic and the role of story;

Story magic usually consists of tricks accompanied by story. More rarely, it is story accompanied by tricks. In either case it tends to be limited to children's magic, gospel magic, and bizarre magick. Ideally, story magic is unaccompanied story. Just as mental magic is simply talk at its best, so general magic is simply story at its best." (Neale, 1991, p.xv)

Here, Neale seems to take the side of narratology but his real intention may be to collapse the distinction between the magic effect and story. For Neale, all magic is about story but he suggests that in the best performances the story and the tricks appear as one.

There are two strong and seemingly opposing approaches that are taken by the bizarre magician to the Gothic. The first is an arch, camp, affectionate but essentially light-hearted approach to performing *spooky* stories with magic. The second takes the performance of magic very seriously and believes that there is an important tradition of performance magic that is inherently philosophical and which naturally deals with the dark side of human nature.

These two approaches may seem antagonistic and many bizarrists have an uneasy relationship with comedy, however some of the most powerful moments in bizarre magick performance occur when the performer takes the serious nature of the performance lightly. Schiller has defined play as, "taking reality lightly" (Schiller, 2007) and we suggest that magicians, who perform the impossible, often benefit when they express this notion theatrically. When a theatrical 'reality' is taken lightly by considering it as a site for the magical to occur then sometimes the monstrous can be fabulous.

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