

## WORKING WONDER

### Lecture Notes

(also for inclusion in *Phasmology II*)

“People will forget what you said; people will forget what you did; but people will never forget how you made them feel.” –Maya Angelou

Put in magician terms: “The trick is never as important as the person who performs it.”

Picasso said, “All artists copy. Great artists steal.” What does that mean?

If you copy, you are only borrowing. It still belongs to somebody else. You are only standing in their shoes, doing their thing. If you steal, you make it your own.

To put this on the level of novel writing, let us say that you read Stephen King’s *The Shining* and liked it so much that you are inspired to write a novel about a man who is hired as a caretaker on a remote island that is a winter retreat that, because of the heat, closes each summer. He takes his wife and daughter and slowly descends into madness as he tries to write a book. The family experience a series of supernatural (or is it psychological?) events, at one point they are chased by statues that come to life, and it all ends in tears.

This is copying. You have only written *The Shining* again and changed a few surface details. The mountain lodge becomes an island resort, winter is now summer, the son is a daughter, and you traded King’s topiaries for statues. It isn’t yours.

If you go back now and rip the guts out of that ‘first draft’ of yours, make the man a serial killer on the run, using this job as a way to hide out, get rid of his family and desire to write a book, and have his victims begin tormenting him in this place he cannot escape—now you have stolen it and made it your own. Suddenly it is different enough that it only superficially looks like King’s book but is substantially a different exploration of motivated isolation.

Putting on a new coat of paint is not enough. You can claim it only if you change the core.

Magicians are often copyists and borrowers who never take the big step of gutting it and making it their own.

You have heard of the three phases of Working Life: Learning, Earning, and Yearning.

You have heard of the five phases of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance.

Allow me to offer you the eight phases of Magic Acquisition: Fascination, Anticipation, Exasperation, Resignation, Contemplation, Realization, Dedication, and Presentation.

Fascination

The magician sees a wonderful trick either in performance or, increasingly, being touted online for sale. My! It looks great. A real wonder.

### Anticipation

The magician waits breathlessly to receive a copy of the undoubted miracle.

### Exasperation

It arrives. Oh, dear. It seems very insubstantial or obvious or (worse) is going to require a lot of practice to make it look nice.

### Resignation

With a sigh, the magician launches in to learning the trick, deeply disappointed that it isn't something else.

Most magicians never make it past this "resignation" stage. They are exasperated and disappointed when they discover it is just a bit of thread and wax (which they probably should have figured out for themselves) and resign themselves to practicing it up a bit and performing it using the supplied patter.

They never realize that they are only halfway to wonder.

Let's talk about Contemplation, Realization, Dedication, and Presentation.

### Contemplation

Okay, so it isn't really real magic. But what is it? Roll it around in your mind for a while. Where's the potential? How might it fit into your show, act, set, or routine?

### Realization

It looked really good when you first saw it. That is what your audience will see if you can make it your own.

### Dedication

Rewrite the plot. Rehearse it until you are sick of doing it.\* Start performing it. Fail to impress a test audience or two. Rework it again. As it starts sparking reactions from other (not the same) test audiences, hone it, polish it, tweak it until the reactions are always really good.

\*an amateur practices until he gets it right; a professional practices until he cannot do it wrong.

### Presentation

Put it into your set. Never stop refining elements of it. Keep it fresh for you. In presenting it, work the timing and *know when to get off*. Stopping at the right moment (leaving them wanting more) is something that can be perfected only with a lot of time in front of audiences. Give yourself that time.

### The Lion and the Magician

Aesop tells of a lion that majestically marched from his den so often that the lesser animals grew accustomed to him and no longer even looked because "familiarity breeds contempt." The magician can learn from this. An effect, while it is occurring, has a very short shelf life. The

more a levitation goes on, the longer the cards keep appearing, the less the audience feels a sense of wonder. It becomes familiar, expected, commonplace. Beware! *Magic is in the moment.*

### You are the Magic

Character is more important than tricks.

### Misdirections

Magic is not deception but rather the managing of perceptions. *How is that not a distinction without a difference?*

When you ask your spectator to 'look here' (with voice or gesture) do not merely distract them from the 'works' . . . *show* them something worth seeing. That is the difference between deception and managing perception. *Reward* them for looking at the 'wrong' place. Make it interesting and entertaining to look there. Delight them with the view. When they are happy that they looked where indicated, they do not consider that they should have been looking someplace else. Then the miracle, when it happens, is all the more wonderful.

# Working Wonder

Brian Jay Corrigan  
“Professor BC”

## You are the Magic

Your persona is more important than the tricks.

$$WI = PO^{10}$$

The work you put into your show/act/routine (WI) is equivalent to the pleasure your audience takes out multiplied by a factor of 10 ( $PO^{10}$ ).

Therefore, *think* about everything:

- Technique (of course—and that is all to be said about the tricks)

But, *even more*, think about

- Scripting
- Character
- Voice
- Costume (including hair & hygiene)
- Props
- ‘Stage look’ (set—even if strolling)
- Overall performance, including
  - Blocking
  - Ad libs

## Turn-out

Your personal presentation

What you wear and how you look is subtle misdirection. Your spectator notices, however subconsciously, *The ‘Atmosphere of Self’*

- Elegance
- Flash
- Style
- Whimsey
- Era
- &c.

It lends a wandering eye and mind something to consider whilst maintaining focus on you. *But go all in. Nothing detracts and demeans like shoddy.* Do not wear a Hallowe’*en* costume unless your character is a kid going trick-or-treating!

## Grooming is vital

*Be* clean even if your character is not meant to look clean (the Indiana Jones Conundrum: costumiers cleaned Indy’s filthy-*looking* clothes every day!)

- Clean fingernails
- Appropriate hair (including facial hair)
- Trim nose and ear hair (chaps)
- Fresh breath(!)

The Corrigan  
Compass  
Rose



*Nothing  
Worthwhile  
is Easy*

### Understanding Persona

Persona is more than character and includes such considerations as

- Subtext
- 'Attitude'
- Purpose/Goal/Reason

Transmitted through

- Scripting
- Vocal inflection
- Facial expression
- Physical 'presence'
- Costume
- Props
- Stage 'picture'

### The Mirror of Truth

Give yourself an *honest* appraisal (not disparaging or flattering, honest) and then *be* what you *are*.

- If you have a kind face and soft body or a willowy body and spiritual look, work *that!*
- Buy in and *believe*:
  - you can play *with* or *against type*, but know your *type* and invest yourself in it

### Stage Fright: Your Best Friend

Identify it:

- If performing is genuinely paralyzing to you, leave the business. It is not for you.
- If, however, performance is simply daunting and makes you feel *intensely* uncomfortable physically and/or emotionally, welcome to the club. That is nothing more than a build-up of the energy that you are going to draw upon in performance.
  - The discomfort vanishes the moment you take the stage

How to deal with it?

- Keep repeating to yourself *I love this* and really mean it.
  - You are living the dream.
  - This is what it is all about
  - Embrace the whole, wonderful experience

Now you are *Working Wonder*.

Here is your emblem.



Adopt it.

Here is what it means...



When you get it, you get it.

Time to get to working wonder:

# ACTING FOR MAGICIANS WORKSHOP

## MY PLEDGE

(The preliminaries: 2 hours)

- I. Bizarre Magic Introduction & Preliminaries (8:30-9:30)
  - a. Philosophy of the Bizarre Paratheatrical Mystery Performer
    - i. Good Acting is great misdirection
    - ii. Magic as Tragedy, not comedy
    - iii. Magic must have purpose; give everything a reason; come to a point
    - iv. The centrality of story
    - v. Nolan's structure (Pledge/Turn/Prestige) as a working ethic = Rise, Strike, Release / Build, Presentation, Point
  - b. Performance considerations: **FOCUS**
    - i. Voice
    - ii. Body
      1. Stance
      2. Movement
    - iii. Stage Placement/vis-à-vis the audience
      1. Entrances ('The Pledge'/Rise)
      2. Introductions
      3. Presentations ('The Turn'/Strike)
        - a. Strike-and-Release
      4. Pay-off ('The Prestige'/Point)
    - iv. Eyes
    - v. Hands
    - vi. Playing Negative Tension
  - c. Prop considerations (making props real)
    - i. Ritual of unpacking (Setup as 'Pledge'/Rise)
    - ii. The look of your prop
    - iii. How to handle a prop
    - iv. Performance (presentation as 'Turn'/Strike)
    - v. What was the **POINT** of it? (*meaning* as 'Prestige')
  - d. Character considerations
    - i. Acting your WHO
      1. Creating a persona
      2. Subtext (what you 'secretly' mean/telegraph when you speak)
      3. Internal *character* monologue
    - ii. Dressing your WHAT and WHERE and WHEN
      1. Elements of costume
        - a. Torso & Limbs
        - b. Shoes
        - c. Hats
        - d. Accessories
        - e. Makeup, hair (facial & otherwise)
      2. Costume as character (status, self-awareness)
      3. Costume as place (area of world)
      4. Costume as era (period of history)
    - iii. Scripting your WHY

1. Story with reason
    - a. Why this story? Why now? Why here?
  2. Words as purpose
    - a. Showing, not telling
    - b. Writing the build (**NARRATIVE DRIVE**)
      - i. *The alluring suggestion that something is ALWAYS about to happen*
  3. Less is more
    - a. Scripting the *Mise-en-Scène*
    - b. Preparing *Le Mot Juste*
- e. **The only *Magic Handling Advice* that you will get in this workshop:**
- i. *Do not become “Mirror Locked”*
    1. *The mirror is good to get started, but you must perform for people, and muff it—lots of times, before your handling is right.*
      - a. *Wet Saddle Blankets*
  - ii. *Practice the bloody effect until you are bloody sick of the bloody thing, never want to see it again, never want to do it again, wonder why you ever took it up to begin with . . . only then are you ready to perform it.*

## II. Actor’s Exercises (9:30-9:45)

- a. Warming the Voice
  - i. Vocalizing warm-up (ahhh)
  - ii. Wide-mouth warm-up
    1. Whether the weather be cold or whether the weather be hot; whether the weather be wet or whether the weather be not; We’ll weather the weather, whatever the weather, whether we like it or not.
  - iii. Tongue limbering
    1. Red leather, yellow leather; Unique New York; Toy boat
  - iv. Psychological/focus warm-up
    1. I am not the pheasant plucker, I’m the pheasant plucker’s son, and I’m only plucking pheasants till the pheasant plucker comes.
- b. Limbering the Body
- c. Setting the Mind
  - i. Exhale soap bubble/mist/scent

## III. Q&A (9:45-10:30)

- a. During this section, I will be asking you what you wish to learn specifically regarding your act. I will want to know your chief medium:
  - i. One-on-One
  - ii. Close-up
  - iii. Parlour/Platform
  - iv. Main Stage
  - v. Combination of the above (specifically, which?)
- b. I will want to know your *acting* and *performance* concerns
  - i. Stage fright/performance anxiety
  - ii. Cold approaching strangers
  - iii. Audience management

- iv. Finding an audience
- v. Being taken seriously (or in the proper/intended frame of mind)
- vi. Anything else

### **YOUR TURN**

(The performance pantomimes: 5 hours (including 1 hour for lunch))

#### IV. Group Divisions (10:30-10:45)

- a. You will be asked how long your act/routine/presentation lasts
  - i. Nothing prepared, just here to learn
  - ii. Short-to-about-5 minutes
  - iii. 5-to-10 minutes
    - 1. Note, because of our numbers, workshop participants are allowed only 10 minutes for turns
    - 2. Turns longer than 10 minutes should plan on performing only a 10-minute portion that they most wish to work on and polish
- b. We will divide into 5-to-6 'breakout' groups
  - i. We will attempt a good mixture in each group of shorter, longer, and longest presentations so to run in tandem during these breakout sessions.

~~e. Prof BC's *Clarissa* as brief example of pantomime performance~~

#### V. Magic Evaluation Exercises (10:45-12:00)

- a. A Close-up act
  - i. Film for evaluation
- b. Walk around
  - i. Film for evaluation
  - ii. Film for evaluation
- c. A Street act
  - i. Film for evaluation
- d. A cabaret act
  - i. Film for evaluation
- e. Character-full act (Eugene Burger)
  - i. Film for evaluation
- f. Playing the Audience (Jeff McBride)
  - i. Film for evaluation

#### VI. LUNCH BREAK (12:00-1:00)

- a. *Note that Prof BC does not take luncheon and will remain in the workshop for anyone who wishes additional, personal time to work and/or ask questions. This is NOT a formal or official part of the workshop. First-come, First-assisted until time runs out.*

#### VII. Group Presentations B (1:00-2:15)

- a. Each group member will have a 10-minute presentation opportunity to use however s/he wishes
  - i. Performing in pantomime the presentation for the group
  - ii. Walking through the presentation for the group
  - iii. Talking through the presentation for the group
  - iv. Discussing with the group ideas for a presentation still in progress
  - v. Q&A with the group & Prof BC about his/her presentation after it has been performed

- vi. Some combination of the above
- b. Prof BC will move from group to group
  - i. In this 'B' run of the workshop, I will interrupt performances to offer suggestions and help block out troublesome or less effective moments
    - 1. Be prepared to stop-and-start during this time

#### VIII. Plenary Presentations (2:15-3:30)

- a. Each group will put forward one (1) member (by vote), total of 5-or-6 persons, who have a presentation that the entire workshop should consider.
  - i. This could indicate an excellent presentation that works as an example of what magical *acting* can be
  - ii. This could be a presentation with interesting difficulties that might be of educational assistance for the group to consider
  - iii. This could be a presentation that 'breaks all the workshop rules' and yet still manages to work just fine (and the group should consider why this is and what that means to their own performances)
  - iv. This could be a presentation that the presenter particularly wishes to perform, and the group is happy to let him/her.
- b. We will use what time remains of each person's 10-minute allowance (if any) to discuss the presentation; if the entire 10-minutes is taken up with performance, 3 additional minutes will be added to allow for responses from the workshop.
- c. If we run through the 5-or-6 presentations and responses and still have time remaining, we will fill the extra time to 3:30 with volunteer presentations from other workshop members.

#### **OUR PRESTIGE**

(What it all comes down to: 1 hour)

Our final hour (3:30-4:30) will be occupied in one of several ways, depending upon how our day has progressed:

- A. Prof BC will personally direct one-or-more acts while the workshop watches, explaining the theatrical purpose for particular choices and demonstrating how to *think* your way through a physical performance
- B. Q&A with Prof BC to clarify what has been covered and better understand issues and approaches
- C. We will continue our Section VII plenary presentations if the workshop prefers (or we are running long)
- D. Some combination of two or more of the above.

#### **THE TAKE-AWAY**

Be aware of your stage picture.

Avoid 'the lineup'

Rehearse without props once you know your moves.

Script for narrative drive.

Perform with purpose/reason and *make a point*.

## Tactics of Line Memorization

I am probably asked about memorization more than any other theatre skill. The short answer is not the one people want to hear: It takes practice and work.

The good news is that, as with physical exercise, the more you do it, the easier it becomes.

Nevertheless, there are tactics to making memorization work for you. Because everyone is different, some of these will be utterly useless to you while others may hold the key. I use the plural because, usually, no one single technique is ‘the’ one. You will discover an evolutionary approach works most efficiently...but it still takes time and patience even after you have achieved real proficiency.

For example, I work almost exclusively long-form (60+ minute) shows, usually delivering memorized scripting the entire time. Once I have honed the script I want, it takes a solid weekend to have the frame of the show in my head and then perhaps as much as two weeks (working diligently at it) before I am reasonably sure that I can deliver the lines “without a net” (before a paying crowd)—and *then* perhaps five-to-ten full-on presentations in front of those crowds before I begin to feel properly comfortable with the text. Only then does the performance start feeling *fun* to do.

So, what are the tactics?

### 1. Develop your script *very carefully*.

Be 95% certain that these are the words you want to say (not necessarily 100% because you will want *a little* room to make changes once you have it on its feet and start the pacing part of your memorization). Write it with care and read it with a highly critical eye. Always approach your written script with the attitude that it is simply not good enough; it is trash, and you have missed every goal you wanted. Look for ways to improve every moment, every word, every phrasing. *This is a critically important step!* There is no use memorizing a script that really does not work for you. Go over it time and time again. How do you know when you are finished? When you go through it looking for rubbish and, finding nothing to alter, you discover that you not only like but are genuinely impressed with what you have written. *Only then are you ready to start memorizing.*

### 2. Identify the script’s Idea Blocks

When delivering memorized text, you are *not* in normal conversation mode, which evolves organically within the situation. Rather, you are in artificially programmed verbal delivery mode, which is structured and intentional. You will (ultimately) create an *illusion* of organic evolution in that delivery, but the first steps are entirely mechanical.

“Idea blocks” are chunks of words that create meaning within each moment of scripted text. The scripted text is a honed and polished work of art, but you begin by breaking that down into its most basic thoughts. Let’s take an extreme example from Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. Here is the scripted text as written:

But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and fair Juliet is the sun! Oh, arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, who is already sick and pale with grief that thou, her maid, art far more fair than she. Be not her maid, for she is envious! Her vestal livery is but sick and green, and none but fools do wear it, cast it off.

Okay, I know, you are not interested in playing Shakespeare, but I wish to demonstrate how this step takes something pretty opaque and makes it crystal clear. Look at this text and come to some determinations as to the movement of *ideas* in it (not emotions—that comes later). These you will now put in your own, simple words, something like this:

Who turned on that light? Oh, it's Juliet. Wow, she's bright like the sun to me, so much better than the pale old moon that you ought to just go ahead and kill. Why not? the moon probably envies you anyway. Get rid of the sick old thing.

This is not something you memorize. It simply gives you an internalized framework to hang those 'real' words on. Suddenly, you are no longer poking meaningless words into your head by rote, flash-card-style (ugh!) You now have a scaffolding of *thought* (in your own words) that presents you with a roadmap of ideas. All that remains is to learn to express these *ideas* using the better words of your scripted text.

### 3. Intensify the visualization

You now know what you are saying, and you are working on connecting those beautiful words to that understanding of ideas. Ramp up the meaning by creating a picture of it in your head. Looking at the scripted text, think of a really good-looking female turning on the light—pow! Now see a flaky sort of moon rising behind her—it always rises in the east. Juliet is really bright in that light, though, so the moon gets sick almost to death. You imagine that the moon is just green with envy, and Juliet needs to leave it behind.

You do something like this as you work through the scripted text, using visualization that is meaningful to you, personally, no matter how silly; often, the sillier the image, the easier it is to keep it attached to the words, so don't be shy about some outrageous pictures in your mind.

Now you are no longer thinking about the words, you are running on ideas and pictures which, with some repetition, become second nature to you...that's just the way those ideas and pictures are *said!*

### 4. Move on

Now that you have worked on that part of the line, move to the next:

It is my lady, oh, it is my love! O, that she knew she were! She speaks, yet says nothing, what of that? Her eye discourses. I will answer it. I am too bold, 'tis not to me she speaks...

And repeat the process for these words. Again, you are interested only in general meaning (idea blocks) and visualizing images that keep the meaning clear to your imagination. Only *then* do you put the words to it.

#### 5. Link it up

Once you have this second section working (sort of) go back (without looking at the script) and try to do the first section and move directly into this second section, still without looking at the text—just from memory.

#### 6. Prepare for frustration

You might surprise yourself and ‘get it’ first try. Pat yourself on the back. This can happen. Or you might not be successful first time. Or you might get it then miss it next time through. It is all part of the process. You will slip up, regularly, as you add new sections. Shake it off, try again, avoid looking at the script and try to do it from memory only. If it just won’t come, peek the script to remind yourself then put it away and try again. You should have a ‘Oh, shoot, that’s right, I remember now” moment if you peek. Good. That is where you want to be. Now do it again.

#### 7. Carry forward

Now go to the next portion of the script and repeat the process. Always finish each step by going right back to the beginning and running through the lines to the end of the new section. Once you feel that you are riding that stallion, add the next portion. Thus, you work through the first phase of memorizing your script.

#### 8. Adding acting

Up to this point, we have been interested only in getting the words chiseled into your brain, but, at some point (you will best know when), you will start to put emphasis on certain moments, add in some character bits, try some meaningful pauses at important moments, start thinking about accents or emphases, and all of the elements that will bring your delivery to life.

I was taught to let this develop organically while working the lines. It is the first step towards adding what are called ‘beats’ into the script. Beats are the tricks of delivery that suggest the character’s internal thought process, or subtext—what your character *means* or *feels* when saying those words—but this is a lesson in memory work, not acting. Still, it is important to know that, even if you are ‘playing yourself’, you are still acting and must consider why you are saying what you are saying and what you mean by those words—and how to deliver them to elicit the desired response from your spectators. If you put that in as you are memorizing (provided you began with a ‘clean’ and ‘intentional’ script back in Step 1), it can be another step towards making the words comfortable and *deliverable* in a performance.

#### 9. Drill it in

For me, the foregoing process takes a solid weekend for a 60-to-75-minute presentation. But I am *far* from ready on that Sunday night. I only have it in my head. I will spend the next two weeks (minimum) running over it again and again.

Use every ‘downtime’ you have: while driving, waiting for an appointment, falling asleep, waking early, whenever you have ‘empty’ minutes, to start at the beginning and run as far through it as you can.

Also, *plan* rehearsal time in your day. Don’t merely wait for empty minutes; create time enough to run through your entire script. Because I do a long show, I need a lot of time. I go to the track on the 105-minute break I get between my morning class and first afternoon class at university. I set out at a very brisk walk and start talking. The students at the gym used to look at me like I was insane, but they have come to accept that I probably am and no longer give me much attention. This process does several things: it helps keep me in shape (important for any performer), it forces me to control my breath as I deliver those lines (and I do verbalize my lines, muttering—this teaches me where my breaths should come and, because this is *hard* whilst walking, the actual performance seems easy in comparison), and, of course, I drill those words into my head whilst *physically* doing something else and *mentally* keeping alert about passing other walkers and watching my time.

Run through your *entire* script at least once every day. Just the words. Forget the magic for the time being. You may certainly *pantomime* doing the moves you require, but do not yet pick up any props.

#### 10. Hitting road blocks/Muscling through

You will still occasionally ‘go up’ or ‘dry’ on lines that you thought you knew. There are lots of reasons for this, but it always comes down to focus. If you are not running those visualizations through your head as you speak, if you let your mind wander, your mouth will run out of words and not know where to go next. You will panic. You will chastise yourself. That is all okay. Muscle through it. Keep moving, if you cannot think what comes next, go to the next thing you can remember or back up to a line you have already said, and push on.

Tag that road block as a ‘problem spot’ and check it (later) in your script to see why you ‘dried’ there. Perhaps you do not have a good enough visualization. Perhaps this is the tongue twister where you often fall apart.

We will cover how to patch those cracks below.

#### 11. Wind sprints

When you are feeling good about just getting through the script. When you can do it pretty regularly, it is time to do what every actor hates most in the process—but is so very helpful: wind sprints.

I learned this whilst taking an acting masterclass with one of my gods: Allan Miller. It is very simple: *run your lines as fast as you possibly can.*

Really put your foot on the gas here. Don’t worry about acting. Just gabble them out from start to finish, first word to last. Try to do the whole script in half your usual time (you cannot, but that is the goal).

Why? Well, “beyond the sheer pleasure of the masochism itself” (Miller’s phrase), you are going to stick and stumble at every spot that you only *think* that you know. This reveals where you need work before you are truly solid with the lines.

## 12. Transitions & Twisters

One usual stumbling block is transitions. When you are moving from one idea to another, particularly if those ideas are unrelated such as when you are moving into a new phase of the routine or another trick entirely, you have no easy image to bridge you over to the new idea.

The other most usual stumbling block is the twister. It may be a difficult line to say (possibly but not necessarily a genuine tongue twister), or it could be a place that for some inexplicable reason you just seldom get past easily.

Sometimes you have formed a mental block about a section of the script. Perhaps you slammed into it early in the memorization process or didn’t do a necessary early step with it, and you have just convinced yourself that it is difficult even if it probably shouldn’t be. This happens a lot.

How can you overcome blocks?

## 13. Internal-line cues

In almost every instance, you can perform ‘actor hypnosis’ within the lines themselves. Just as the singer who listens for her pitch cue from the lead-in to her song, you can find lead-in cues from the lines you are already saying.

How? Look for cue words or even sounds from just before your transition or twister that will carry you into (and over) your problem area.

For example, let us imagine that you have a line that you have written and love about

*‘those chains and shackles of regret forever bind the soul and torture the mind,’*

but you always pause or stumble just as you reach it. Your face goes blank for a moment, you roll your eyes upwards searching for that bothersome line, and then, at last, it connects, and you are off again. Awkward moment. You just cannot beat it by muscling through.

Solution? Go back a line (no farther) and try to find something that will tee that ball up for you.

Let us pretend that the line before it, which you always remember, reads

*‘it is no use to pull your hair or hope for deliverance’*

You probably have no trouble with this line because ‘pull your hair’ is a familiar phrase that cues itself and then ‘hair’ subconsciously cues ‘hope’ because they both start with the h sound. Simple enough. But you never can get that next line about regret. What to do? Look *hard* at that easy line and find a cue—make one up! What I would do is key into ‘hair’ again and think of “Harry (hairy) Houdini” all bound up in chains and shackles. Now, every time I say the easy line, I automatically see Houdini, and the next line, *chains and shackles*, just delivers itself. I also have the happy accident of a rhyme in that challenging line (bind/mind) that will carry me the rest of the way through it.

The point is that you can use the script to cue you through the rough or challenging parts of it. Simply back up to a place that you find easy and locate a sound or image that you can link somehow to the hard part. You will find that it is a form of self-hypnosis. Without even thinking about it, as soon as you say that easy bit, the sound or image will automatically cue you over the next part, and your problem is no more.

Sometimes the sound of words themselves tee up the next line, if you learn to listen for them. Look for a word in the line before your troublesome one. Find a letter in that line that matches the first letter in the one you cannot remember. Now, every time you pronounce that first letter, associate it with the same letter beginning that word in the next line:

He was not **t** there.

**T**rouble was there instead.

Let the 't' in 'not' always remind you of the 't' in 'Trouble,' and you will always move smoothly into that line.

#### 14. Pacing and Bearing

Once the words are reliably in your head, and you can say them through without any real concerns, you are ready to put it on its feet, work in the acting, the blocking, the magic, and (perhaps most importantly from an entertainment perspective) pacing.

I cannot teach you 'presence,' as in 'stage presence.' I used to think I could teach it, but over the years I discovered that presence is an outgrowth of personality, and you are who you are. There are only three possible scenarios: you 'have it,' and the room automatically lights up when you enter (congratulations, that is a rare gift); you do not 'have it,' and there is no way to fake it (sorry); or it is under the surface, and you can call it forth when you need it (these are the best balanced performers, those who know when they are 'off' and can relax into being people again).

You can, however, learn to use 'presence' by studying pace and bearing. We are into acting now, but it can be useful for memory work, too.

It is an old axiom of theatre performance that when you stand, stand, when you sit, sit; don't waiver. This is *bearing*. Likewise, when you speak, speak with purpose; when you are silent, be silent with intention. This is *pacing*. Every moment you are on the platform is a moment in suspension. You are in a constant state of mesmerizing, hypnotizing, fascinating, or electrifying everyone watching—or you are not doing your job.

How does this help with memory? To quote Hamlet, you must "suit the action to the word, the word to the action." When you begin to think in terms of putting the script 'on its feet,' you will discover that it becomes easier to remember lines when you are suddenly *doing* something logical as you say them.

It may be as simple as taking a few steps this way as you talk about a person who wandered into the woods or else picking up a prop while saying some memorized words about its colour, design, or history. These physical cues are also valuable to memory work.

At the same time, *listen* to what you are saying, and make a point of *doing* something that helps underscore the *meaning* and/or *importance* of what you are saying, remembering always that

### WORDS ARE FAR BETTER MISDIRECTION THAN ACTIONS

Scripting is one of the most underused weapons in the magician's arsenal. A well-turned phrase or evocative description (well presented) will make your audience go to that mental place for a moment during which they are charmed into self-misdirecting.

Also, If your words propel you to move in certain, clearly motivated ways, you are not only entertaining your audience, but you are also making your job easier, for if you are *doing* something very logical and well-integrated into what you are saying, that hand going into the pocket seems only natural, and no one will be thinking 'steal' or 'ditch.'