

# A critical evaluation of the movie magic

Virtually everyone can express feelings of love, hate, joy and anger. In certain situations we may mask our true feelings for the sake of appearance, and in some cases we may not even be consciously aware of what our deepest feelings really are or be able to show them. These aspects of human nature are universal and have been employed by every great writer who has tried to illustrate the complexity and scope of human emotions.

A captivating theme has been the question of what the same person would be like under vastly different circumstances. In some cases the variables have been time, as in Mark Twain's *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*; social class, as in *The Prince and the Pauper* also by Twain; or chemistry, as in Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Works such as these serve as literary laboratories that help us to know ourselves better by studying the feelings and actions of others.

Author William Goldman has given the Jekyll and Hyde concept an intriguing new dimension. In his best-selling novel and in his screenplay for the film, *Magic*, he has created a situation in which the characters representing good and evil have different bodies and voices, appear together simultaneously, even have conversations together, and yet are really one person. The explanation for the seeming puzzle is that the main characters are a ventriloquist and his dummy. Their relationship is obviously bizarre, yet it is especially startling because it is plausible.

The images and suspense of the screenplay are conveyed with striking clarity by director Richard

Attenborough. With careful attention to delineating character and establishing moods by somber autumnal location settings, he has employed the subtle communicative capabilities of the film medium so that, in combination with the musical score by Jerry Goldsmith, the power of the dialogue is well complemented visually.

Corky, (Anthony Hopkins) the ventriloquist is a tormented man trapped by the pain of his past and a fear of the future. He responds to the world by using Fats, his dummy, as a second personality that embodies those characteristics that are deep within him but that he cannot outwardly express.

Corky is gentle and possesses an innocent charm. Although he is an extremely skillful magician, he is too shy and nervous to be comfortable as a performer. It is only when his aging mentor can no longer go on the Corky reluctantly agrees to perform before an audience. Despite his talent, his debut performance as a magician is disastrous. The inattentive and uncaring audience so angers Corky that he explodes with rage. As time goes by and he introduces Fats into the act, he is able to captivate audiences. Not only do people respond to his talent as a ventriloquist, they find the repartee between Corky and his acid-tongued dummy enormously entertaining.

What no one else is aware of is the peculiar manifestation of Corky's emotional problems. His perception of Fats does not change regardless of the context. On stage, in the audience, Fats has all the attributes and aspects of humanity. Folded up in his carrying case however, Fats would appear to be no more than a large wooden doll wearing child's

clothing. For Corky, Fats is not simply the instrument with which he entertains and audience. He is a companion. He knows what Corky is thinking and he has the answers to Corky's problems. Through Corky's needs and Corky's Belief, Fats is virtually alive with a distinct personality of his own the opposite of Corky.

Corky's increasing success brings him to the attention of a renowned agent, Ben Greene (Burgess Meredith). With Greene to guide his career, Corky is offered prestigious and lucrative appearances at exclusive nightclubs and even the opportunity to star in a network television special. The future seems assured for Corky, but it all begins to evaporate when he refuses to take a standard medical exam required as part of the television contract.

Realized that his emotional problems will be discovered his fear of rejection and failure and perhaps even more frightened by success, Corky runs away to the Catskill Mountain region where he grew up. To his surprise, there he finds Peggy Ann Snow (Ann-Margret), a former high school classmate. Though he was never able to tell her, Corky had loved Peg in high school and he has loved her for fifteen years since carrying her picture with him in unrequited devotion. From what we can infer about Corky's past, Peg unknowingly represents his only opportunity to express affection. Everyone else whom Corky has cared for or respected is gone.

The chance meeting between Peg and Corky is very important to her as well. Her thoughts about her unhappy marriage made Corky's sincere affection especially appealing in her eyes. Corky asks her to leave her

husband for him and she agrees.

To be loved by Peg is all that Corky has ever really wanted. As Corky says, she is "Salvation." Yet it is the joy of that relationship that sets up a terrible inner conflict for Corky: his unconscious and strongest motivation, as represented by Fats, is self-destruction. As Corky's opportunity for happiness becomes more real, the anger and will of Fats becomes more powerful.

Ben Greene locates Corky and he alone begins to understand the intensity of Corky's dependence on Fats. Ben will get medical help for Corky and perhaps Corky will even co-operate. Fats, though, is determined to survive. In an ironic reversal of roles, using Corky as an instrument of his will; Fats murders Ben Greene. With participation in Ben's death, Corky's submission to Fats becomes nearly complete; he is helpless. Corky cannot conceal the murder and is fearful of discovery, but Fats knows what to do and provides the answers.

To the extent that Corky has retained a mind of his own, the promise of a life with Peg remains the ultimate happiness. In a dramatic attempt to overcome Fats's control, Corky tells Fats that he is going to be left behind and the Corky wants to live alone with Peg. With this, Fats declares war, he threatens to tell about the murder. How? One night, during a performance, he will simply reveal the story to an entire audience. Fats even destroys Peg's confidence in Corky's love by making her believe that Corky's affection is insincere and that her trust is the result of mere trickery. "Everyone wants to believe in magic, Peg" he tells her.

Fats is not satisfied, however, merely with hurting Peg and

ruining her relationship with Corky. In a move designed to show his total dominance and to shatter Corky emotionally, Fats commands Corky to get his knife, go to Peg's house, and kill her. Corky tries desperately to resist, but he is unable to withstand the terrible physical pain that is a manifestation of his inner turmoil.

Corky and Fats die in a dimly lit cabin. As the camera pulls away the cabin is revealed to be almost marooned in a sea of darkness the isolation a fitting postscript to the anguish experienced by Corky. With this and other visual metaphors Richard Attenborough portrays the strain of Corky's life. The nightclub where he entertains is uncomfortably "hot" with bright lights; almost always under pressure, Corky is often in close-up the intensity of his pain "larger-than-life" on the screen; and the bleakness of the Catskills (actually northern California) is oppressively felt as a result of the predominant gray tones used in those scenes.

Sometimes what a director doesn't shoot is as important in its absence as what is on film. As an example, while it is clearly stated that after a difficult start Corky becomes quite successful, we never see him experiencing that success. He is never seen entertaining at an elegant nightclub or pursued for autographs by admiring fans. Never particularly well-dressed, the only time he is shown at an expensive restaurant he is conspicuous and out of place and that is the nature of Corky's relationship to practically everything around him.

For Corky, whose understanding and acceptance of reality was nearly impossible, all that remained was his belief in magic.

on a  
he  
ny  
a  
le  
is  
ne  
ed  
of  
in  
ve  
nd

## Beaverbrook art gallery schedule

February 22, 1979, 12:30 p.m.  
"The Shadow Catcher, Edward S. Curtis and the North American Indian" (88 mins., colour)

Disarmingly accurate appraisal of Curtis' lifework. Includes location shots and clips from Curtis' feature film *In The Land of the War Canoes*.

March 1, 1979, 12:30 p.m.  
"Mexican Ceramics" (18 mins., colour)

A unique reflection of the Mexican heritage seen in one of the best-known folk arts, pottery. The pottery centres of Tonala, Metepec, Coyotepec, and Puebla are described, with typical examples of work from each location expressing the ideals of the community and environment in which the artists live.

"Rufino Tamayo: The Sources of his Art" (27 mins., colour)

A homage to Rufino Tamayo, Zapotecan Indian painter known as "the most Mexican of all painters." He is shown at work beginning and completing a canvas in his studio, and the development of his style is illustrated by a selection of his

paintings from the early 1930's to the present. He speaks about the derivation and use of colours in his painting, and of the influences on his art, especially his ever-present awareness of the ancient civilizations of Mexico.

"Une Statuette" (13 mins., colour)

A strange terracotta statuette belonging to the ancient Teotihuacan civilization, and recently found in Mexico, is sensitively filmed by Carlos Vilardebo. The tiny figure, seeming both an innocent doll and a tragic divinity, evokes impressions of a dream-like Mexico.

March 8, 1979, 12:30 p.m.

"These were the Maya"  
"America's First City"

"Sentinals of Silence"

April 5, 1979, 12:30 p.m.  
"Eugene Atget" (10 mins., b/w)

Everyday sights in Paris at the turn of the century seen in the rare photographs of Eugene Atget. Streets, cafes, shop windows, statued gardens, chestnuts in bloom, a barrel organ, provide a bequilling and nostalgic exhibition of the work of this distinguished French photographer.

"Atget" (30 mins., b/w)

Representative photographs by the turn-of-the-century French photographer, Eugene Atget, with explanatory narration by Bernice Abbott, former protegee of Atget.

"Daguerre: The Birth of Photography" (29 min., b/w)

Daguerre, artist and stage designer came upon the method of photographic reproduction to which he gave his name, while working on a diorama for the Paris Opera. His partnership with Niepce, and the relation of his invention to that of Fox Talbot (the talbot-type) and other pioneers of the art are discussed.

April 12, 1979, 12:30 p.m.  
"Photography: Dorothea Lange - The Closer for Me" (30 mins., b/w)

Photographs of several periods - the Depression, World War II, and the contemporary California urban sprawl - are shown as Dorothea Lange discusses her view of the world. In an interview, she expresses her belief that the world today is not being honestly photographed and suggests the point of view needed.

"Photography: Dorothea Lange -

Under the Trees" (30 mins., b/w)

Dorothea Lange, who died in 1965, was one of the most famous American photographers and one who strove to photograph her subjects as objectively as possible without interposing her own personality. She is seen in her California home as she prepares a one-woman exhibit on covering a half-century and she comments on the reasons and responses that have led her to photograph particular scenes.

April 19, 1979, 12:30 p.m.

"Photography: The Daybooks of Edward Weston - How Young I Was" (30 mins., b/w)

Edward Weston's philosophy and growth are reflected in writings he called his "daybooks". In examining his photographs, quotations from the daybooks are used to give further insight into the significance of his work.

"Photography: The Daybooks of Edward Weston - The Strongest Way of Seeing" (30 mins., b/w)

Edward Weston strove for simplicity in his work, for the strongest and clearest way of seeing what was around him. This

aim is reflected in photographs of his study in Point Lobos, California, his cat portraits, and samples from his satirical and civil defense series.

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH CHINA:

1750 - 1850  
By Miss Betty Ramsay of the China Shop Montreal  
February 6, 1979 at 12:30 p.m.

Following the lecture Miss Ramsay will conduct a clinic for the attribution of porcelain brought in by the public. Only those pieces which do not have the country of origin marked on them will be eligible. Those bringing porcelain for attribution should see that the pieces arrive at the gallery one hour before the lecture begins.

THE EVOLUTION OF LANDSCAPE

TRADITION IN QUEBEC ART  
By Laurier Lacroix, Assistant Prof.  
Concordia University, Montreal  
February 20, 1979 at 12:30 p.m.

This lecture is held in conjunction with the landscape painting in Quebec exhibition organized by the Musee du Quebec on display at the Beaverbrook Art Gallery between February 1 - 28, 1979.