O’Brien’s Essay
“The Magic Show”
Magic a metaphor for writing, storytelling?

• Illusion involves the creation of a new and improved reality. Writing is the same.

• “Above all, writing fiction involves a desire to enter the mystery of things: that human craving to know what cannot be known.”
Magic and Storytelling

• In many cultures, including our own, the magician and the storyteller are embodied in a single person
• Christ, for example, is both a miracle-worker and a teller of parables
• In fiction, an “incorporeal” but nonetheless genuine ‘aliveness’ to characters. The writer, like the shaman, serves as a medium between two different worlds—the world of ordinary reality and the extraordinary world of the imagination
Mystery in Storytelling

• Good storytelling involves a “plunge into mystery of the grandest order.”
Plots

• Plot involves the mystery of the future: what will happen?
• But need not give the impression of finality.
• “The plot mystery of life—what will happen to us, to all of us, to the human race—is unresolved and must remain that way if it is to endure as a compelling story.”
• A satisfying plot involves not a diminution of mystery but rather a fundamental enlargement.
Character

• Fundamental mystery of otherness in character.
• Characterization in storytelling is achieved not through a pinning down process, but rather through a process that opens up and releases the mysteries of the human spirit.