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**WHAT ARE THE TERMS NEEDED TO CREATE A THEATRE PLAY ABOUT THE
LEGENDARY MANAWATU OUTLAW JOSEPH PAWELKA THAT WILL
UNIVERSALISE HIS STORY AND MAKE IT RELEVANT FOR A
CONTEMPORARY AUDIENCE?**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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New Zealand.**

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Abstract

I have always been intrigued by the story of the Manawatu outlaw and ‘Man Alone’ folk hero Joseph Pawelka. In planning this thesis I had two objectives. My first was to test the possibility that I could write a play centred on a historical figure such as Pawelka that would be both mythic and resonant for a modern audience. My second objective was to analyse and reflect upon the entire process of researching and writing this play.

My research for the play, *Smoke and Mirrors*, has been both literary and historical. In order to write with depth and accuracy I needed to research Joseph Pawelka’s life and times and my thesis essay has given an overview and an analysis of my findings. These were taken from books, folk memory, newspapers of the day, files in National Archives, and also from later secondary sources.

In literary terms, the thesis has charted the artistic and theatrical choices I made as I developed the play, *Smoke and Mirrors*, into a work of non-naturalistic theatre. As part of my literary research I explored three plays written in similarly non-naturalistic style – Frank Wedekind’s two (combined) *Lulu* plays, Bertolt Brecht’s opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and Mervyn Thompson’s *Children of the Poor*. The finished version of my play *Smoke and Mirrors* contains theatrical elements and techniques taken from each of these three plays, and the thesis has recorded this process.

The thesis has also included an account of the first production of *Smoke and Mirrors* in October 2012 in Palmerston North and an overview of the various strengths and weaknesses of the play in performance.

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Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	ii
CONTENTS	iv
PART 1	4
Biographical History	4
Economic and Social Context.....	5
PART 2	8
Frank Wedekind and the <i>Lulu</i> plays	10
Bertolt Brecht and <i>The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny</i>	16
Mervyn Thompson and <i>Children of the Poor</i>	22
PART 3	29
<i>Smoke and Mirrors</i> Taking Shape	29
<i>Smoke and Mirrors</i> The Writing	30
PART 4	42
<i>Smoke and Mirrors</i> First Production	42
CONCLUSION	49
NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY	50
<i>SMOKE AND MIRRORS</i> PLAY TEXT – ORIGINAL VERSION	55
<i>SMOKE AND MIRRORS</i> PLAY TEXT – VERSION II – ABRIDGED	92
PHOTOGRAPHS <i>Smoke and Mirrors</i> First Production	56
	57
	89
	90
	91
	121

What are the terms needed to create a theatre play about the legendary Manawatu character Joseph Pawelka that will universalise his story and make it relevant for a contemporary audience ?

Smoke and Mirrors: the enigma of Joseph Pawelka

A long time ago, when I was still a child, my father reached his arm into the dark cobwebby cupboard under the stairs in my grandmother's old house in Foxton Line. He pulled out a flat piece of wood. It had three big black iron coat hooks screwed on to it. I touched one of the hooks. It felt cold on my fingers. 'What's that?' I said.

'This is a piece of wood from the Boys' High School' said Dad, 'the one that was burned down. My father picked up this piece of wood afterwards, and made a coat rack.' Dad seemed oddly proud of it.

'Who burned it down?'

'Joseph Pawelka' said Dad.

I didn't know it then but this episode started me on a search that is still continuing. Over the years I wondered about this man with the strange name, and why he would burn down an almost new high school. I was intrigued by someone who for a brief period in 1910 and 1911 seemed to have set the entire Manawatu community into an uproar. Who was he? And where did he come from? The Palmerston North I knew was a place where people washed their cars and dug their gardens and went dutifully to work and school. Even his name was exotic and foreign. Joseph Pawelka had a kind of mad unruly glamour about him. He had been an outlaw, a 'Man Alone' long before that term was even thought of in New Zealand, and in my own prosaic community!

I started to look for Joseph Pawelka, and I found fragments of him in old microfilmed newspaper articles, and in court files, books, magazines and photographs, until gradually I began to piece together his story. I soon realised that my father would not have been born when Joe Pawelka went on his rampage. Dad 'remembered' what had been passed on to him by his parents, and from his young aunts and uncles who were still living next door then, and by the children who whispered and giggled and played 'Joe Pawelka' shootouts and hold-up games at school. However, my grandfather was a crack shot and belonged to the local rifle

brigade. He would have been called out to hunt Joseph Pawelka along with the other armed volunteers, while Grandma locked the front door, put out the lights and sat shivering in her darkened kitchen. Joe had held up and robbed Mr and Mrs Kendall, in their own home in Foxton Line, a house that is still there, just along from my grandparents' house. He had tied one of Mrs Kendall's blouses around his face, but they both knew it was him because of the way he talked. Mrs Kendall, who had been one of Dad's teachers at West End School! No wonder Grandpa had picked up that small wooden souvenir.

As I thought about Joe and his story then, I had a sense of time collapsing, a sense that the Manawatu of 1910 and 1911 is still there, just underneath the crust of the Manawatu of today, and sometimes, at pressure points, even pushing up through it, insisting on being heard. Joe is one of those pressure points. He is of and from his own historical period – the first few years of the 20th century – but in his marginalisation, his isolation, his alienation, and his ever increasing silence he is modern, and he reflects modern concerns. I was fascinated by Joe, and by the almost mythic figure he became. The more I searched for him, the more I found of him, although how much was fact and how much was legend was becoming increasingly difficult to determine.

I decided to write a play about Joseph Pawelka – one that would help me explore not only what happened to Joe himself and how he felt about it, but also how he affected the wider community in his turn. From the start I knew that this play, although set almost a hundred years ago, could not be merely a dry historical account, it still had to be vital and relevant, still needed to appeal to anyone watching today. So this was the question I set myself, and the task that is the subject of this thesis - how can I write a play centred on Joseph Pawelka that will universalise his story and will challenge, interest, and engage a contemporary audience?

Shape and form of thesis

This thesis is about searching and about finding. In the work that follows I am setting out to find a way to make a new New Zealand play, and I am just as equally searching for its main character. Hence my research task is both literary and historical. In this thesis I will need to set down an account of Joseph Pawelka and the community he came from; to explore and discuss the literary and theoretical models I have used; and also to describe the construction and writing of the play itself, and its reception when it is finally put before an audience.

The thesis will be in four parts. In the first I will give a brief biographical account of Joseph Pawelka himself and what I have found of him in folk memory and historical record. In addition I will set his life in a wider economic and social context – what was happening in the Manawatu, and in New Zealand as a whole in the first few years of the 20th century that is relevant to his experience?

The second part of the thesis will be concerned with the literary and theatrical models I choose to read and reflect on as I set out to write this play. In particular, I will be looking at expressionist and non-naturalistic styles of theatre, and at varying techniques of stagecraft that I can use to help make my play resonant and immediate to its audience.

The third part will concern the construction of the play itself, the style and shape of it, the literary and theatrical ideas and techniques I have taken from those play texts I have used, and the reasons I have chosen them.

The fourth part of the thesis will centre on the first production of my new play and will ask the questions: Did the play work theatrically? Were my intentions to universalise Pawelka's story realised? Did the play seem relevant from the perspective of 2012?

Part One

Biographical History

Joseph (Joe) Pawelka was born on the 4th of August 1887, the eldest son of Moravian born parents. He attended school in Kimbolton but left when he was 13 to be apprenticed to a butcher. For the next few years, apart from a spell of severe illness, he seems to have worked in the butchery trade around the Manawatu and in Dannevirke.

In September 1909, when he was 22, Joe married Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Wilson, from Ashhurst. The marriage was unsettled and short-lived. After only a few months, Lizzie sought and was granted a separation order and Joe was later arrested and charged with theft after several stolen items were found in the couple's rented home in Church Street. Joe was confined to the police cells in Palmerston North, but escaped, was recaptured and sent to the Terrace Gaol in Wellington and escaped again.

His return to Palmerston North was marked with a trail of hold-ups and burglaries, and sparked a widespread manhunt with a reward of one hundred pounds offered for his capture. Enlisted soldiers and armed volunteer civilians joined the police in the search for Joseph Pawelka and also patrolled the streets of Palmerston North. In the alarm and hysteria of the manhunt, two of the searchers were shot dead, and three major fires destroyed buildings in Palmerston North.

After several weeks of living rough in winter weather, Joe was eventually recaptured in a farmer's shed in Ashhurst. He was tried, pronounced an habitual criminal and sentenced to 21 years in gaol. At this point, strangely, the mood of the public changed. From living in panic and fear of Joe Pawelka, many citizens now claimed they had helped him while he was on the run, and others protested at the severity of his sentence – even drawing up a large petition asking that the sentence be reduced.

Joe for some months behaved as a model prisoner, but he had retained an uncanny ability to get himself out of gaol. In early August 1911 he made the first of several new escape attempts, but was once more recaptured. He finally escaped for good on 27 August 1911. He never came to public notice again. It seems likely that he was able to evade capture until he left New Zealand permanently in early 1912, but his ultimate fate is unknown.

Economic and Social Context

By the first decade of the 20th century New Zealand had emerged from the long depression of the 1880's and parts of the country were booming. In particular, the Manawatu, now at the hub of the newly completed North Island railway network and with its rich farming resource of dairying, wool and frozen meat, had a newly buoyant economy. Palmerston North, the biggest town in the region had grown, from its beginnings in the 1870's as a rough bush camp in a clearing, to a thriving settlement of more than ten thousand people.¹ The town had a good selection of primary schools, both state and private, and also the handsome new Boys' and Girls' High School, opened in 1902. The citizens of Palmerston North were proud of their spacious Square with its King Edward VII Memorial Fountain and its lakelet formed into the shape of a butterfly with a rustic bridge across its middle. There was the large new central Post Office at the corner of Main Street, and already, a brass band society and an opera house which could host both local artists and also big visiting shows. In 1911 the first purpose built cinema (His Majesty's Theatre) opened in George Street. Churches were well established and well attended throughout the wider Manawatu district, and functioned as centres of social life as well as centres of worship for their individual members. The back-breaking hardships of early pioneer settlement were over, and people had more time for leisure and for fun. Settlers flocked happily to the newly opened horse racing track at Awapuni, or enjoyed cycling, cricket and rugby. Hotel bars were still well patronised, though behaviour in them was generally better than in previous larrikin pioneer days when drunks were picked up off the road each morning and carted away on the back of a dray to sleep off the excesses of the night before. Politically in this period New Zealand was relatively stable. The reforming Liberal Party under John Balance 1891- 93, Richard John Seddon until 1906, and Joseph Ward until early 1912, lasted twenty-one years. In 1907, during this term of the Liberal Government, New Zealand ceased to call itself a colony and became a more independent 'dominion'.²

However, there were still strong ties with the mother country. On the 24th May, Queen Victoria's birthday, Empire Day was still celebrated by Palmerstonians as it was by all New Zealanders. Edward Shirley's verse 'Children of the Empire' was printed in May 1910 in the New Zealand School Journal³

*Children of the Empire, clasp
hands across the main,
and Glory in your brotherhood,
again and yet again;
Uphold your noble heritage –*

*oh, never let it fall –
And love the land that bore you,
but the Empire best of all.*

and few New Zealanders at this time would have doubted its sentiments. But, despite its patriotic allegiance to Britain, the Manawatu, along with the rest of New Zealand, was changing. For the first time people took pride in being both British and New Zealanders ⁴. There were other changes too. Even small rural hamlets such as Feilding, Kimbolton and Ashhurst, were becoming steadily more urbanised. Increasingly, people were drifting to the towns. Contrary to fond popular belief, by 1910 New Zealand was already an urban society and it had an urban culture.

This new culture of urban settlement brought with it winners and losers. The early pioneer period had also had its share of men and women struggling to hack a life out of the bush, and defeated by floods, by hunger, by injury or isolation. But urbanisation brought new stresses. More and more workers sought jobs in the towns and work patterns were changing. Real wages for workers did not rise (except for miners) from 1910 until 1913, but inflation did. ⁵ Haves and have-nots were more visible in the town where people lived and worked more closely together. In the progressive Manawatu region of the period an educated and ambitious lawyer, shopkeeper or factory manager could do very well for himself and his family, but a hard-up worker could struggle and sink into oblivion. Joseph Pawelka's family was working class. His father (also Joseph) worked as a grave-digger and casual labourer in Kimbolton, harvesting grasses and collecting seed from newly cleared bush land. ⁶ They were immigrants from central Europe in a predominantly English settlement. ⁷ They were Roman Catholic in a community where the majority of the people were Protestant. Families such as the Pawelkas could strive hard to fit in to their communities and might ultimately thrive, but they could just as easily become marginalised.

Sometimes, in this first decade of the century, larger and more cosmic events happened in New Zealand. In November 1910 Robert Falcon Scott, leader of the British Antarctic (Terra Nova) Expedition, set off with much fanfare from the port of Lyttelton, but his polar team dragged their sledges into history and into heroic Antarctic myth by never returning.

Earlier that same year, from April 10 until April 20, Halley's Comet blazed through the skies of New Zealand, an unforgettable sight especially for those small children who were

woken up by their parents and taken from their beds to go outside and see it. Joseph Pawelka too must have looked up and watched Halley's Comet in those bitter days from the 10th to the 17th of April when he was on the run from police, although the autumn weather then is described as rainy, dark, and freezing cold so he may not have seen much.

Part Two

Beginning on the play *Smoke and Mirrors*. What form should it take?

The bald facts of Joe's life are polished shiny and hard by naïve reportings, by gossip, by back-door yarns and by a thousand subsequent re-tellings. But nothing is ever that simple, and Joe, the real Joe, is far harder to pin down. Sometimes it seems there are two Joe Pawelkas – the first one a man on the margins who always wanted things better for himself and his family, but who never seemed to be able to make his dreams a reality. This Joe is a boy who never fitted in. He is a boy who seemed to lie every bit as often as he told the truth, and a young man whose only attempt at marriage ended in disaster. But there is also a second, a larger and more shadowy, Joseph Pawelka. He is the face at the window, the mythical outlaw, half feared, half admired by the people of the Manawatu as he stalks their streets, holds up their citizenry and hides in their hay barns. He is the man parents warn their children about. He is 'Out There', a tough resourceful 'Man Alone', a man of legend, a desperado who can taunt authority and evade capture until finally he becomes his own disappearing trick – more magician than man. Which Joe is which, and how do they fit together?

As I mull over Joe and his story I decide there is a third element I need to include in any theatrical piece about him. He did not exist in a vacuum. The people of the wider Manawatu district were a significant force in Joe's life as he constantly sought their approval but in return gained mainly hostility and rejection. However just as the community served to mould and shape Joe into the man he became, then his actions, and the darkness and danger that seemed to cling around him, excited and repelled the community in equal measure so that he is remembered by many Manawatu people until this day.

Thus I have three factors to build my play around – the 'real' Joe and his story, the shadowy legendary Joe that his story became, and the people of the wider Kimbolton, Ashhurst Manawatu community that Joe grew up and moved among. How am I going to structure this three point play? What form should it take?

I consider first a straight linear and 'realistic' re-telling of Joe's story. It does have appeal and would work perhaps as a community play with a large cast, lively specially written songs and some deeper resonances into community attitudes and social mores then and even now. However, I reject this. To tell Joe's story and to find its mythical essence I'm looking for

something larger than ‘real’ life and far more dissonant. Something dreamlike and theatrical where shadows and light, real and subconscious action blend and blur until it is hard to tell which one is which. I’m looking for carnival, incongruity, vaudeville, and burlesque. This is a young man’s story full of a near adolescent young man’s passionate excitement and over-arching despair. I need to reflect this in a more visceral way than in a straight realist re-telling.

In the play I write I will be primarily seeking to pull together two different elements. Firstly, I want to give a real sense of Joseph Pawelka and what is going on in his mind. I want to show fragments of Joe as a quick child, and as a lonely teenager with a chip on his shoulder. I want to show something of Joe’s hatred of cowardice, his conflicted feelings about women, his personal sense of injustice when he is on the run from police. But secondly, in tandem with these portrayals of Joseph Pawelka the young man, I want to use the play to explore the way a myth such as the ‘Man Alone’ myth can develop and take hold in a community and in a nation. Regardless of how ‘true’ it is, the ‘Man Alone’ myth still has a powerful grip on the New Zealand imagination. It is how most of us never were, but how we often like, perhaps even need, to think of ourselves – tough, wily and resourceful, anti-authoritarian and self-sufficient - able to live off the land and survive on our own in the New Zealand bush. Joseph Pawelka was one of our earliest known Men Alone (there have been several more of them since). In fact John Mulgan refers indirectly to Joe in his seminal novel *Man Alone* (although, probably writing and remembering this from his home in England, Mulgan gets the region wrong.) Bill Crawley, the old bush prospector is reminiscing to Johnson, the central character of the novel, about the exploits of the legendary Australian Ned Kelly, and the Kelly gang. Then he moves closer to home.

‘ *I don’t know, son. What about that fellow in the Wairarapa?*’

‘I never heard of him.’

*‘Rode around the Wairarapa for days on end with a gun, broke gaol and all.
Fellows out looking for him shot each other by mistake. They didn’t shoot him.’*

‘I never heard of him, Bill.’

*‘Well, he did all right for himself. You could make a good living with somewhere to
hide in the hills here – and a good horse. ...’*⁸

I am beginning to see that it will not be easy to yoke the fragments of the real character ‘Joe’ to the mythic, the fantastical and grotesque and farcical elements that I plan for the play I have now named *Smoke and Mirrors*, but I know it can be done. The play will be drawn

from life but not in any naturalistic way. It will be episodic in character and will jump in time and space, but the work will nevertheless have its own distinctive unity of stagecraft and of style.

I start looking for literary and theatrical models for *Smoke and Mirrors*. I am seeking plays that tell a story but are written in an expressionist style - works that are able to reflect how a driven character such as Joe might feel from the inside, as well as observing him from the outside. I am searching for fast-moving and sharp-edged plays, where the story is told in vigorous colloquial language and with minimal scenery and props, and preferably, with music. Always in my mind as I begin on this work is the need for my play to be a vital and relevant piece of theatre that will engage audiences today. Hence, I am looking for lively, resonant and somewhat unsettling theatre - a selection of works that provides food for thought as well as entertainment.

I find plays such as this among the surreal and stylised works of late 19th and early 20th century Europe. These strikingly non-naturalistic works are all part of a long theatrical tradition that extends back beyond Georg Büchner (1813-37) and his play *Woyzeck*, and forwards through the works of the iconoclast Frank Wedekind (1864-1918) and onwards to Wedekind's ardent follower Bertolt Brecht (1898-1956) and even on ahead of him to influence playwrights writing today.

I decide primarily, I will look at Frank Wedekind's two *Lulu* plays (written between 1892 and 1894) and Bertolt Brecht's opera *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* (1928). In addition, for a later New Zealand connection, I will look at Mervyn Thompson's adaptation of John A. Lee's novel *Children of the Poor* (1989). In reading and examining these play texts closely I do not mean to slavishly copy any of them (they are each very different). Rather I would like to explore more of non-naturalistic theatre - to tease out more of how it works, and what gives the best of these plays such strangely urgent power. I will be looking at the content and structure of each of these plays, their forms and the themes they embody and, above all, their theatrical styles.

Frank Wedekind and the Lulu Plays

I begin this exploration with Frank Wedekind's masterpiece, the two Lulu plays *Der Erdgeist* (*The Earth Spirit*) and *Die Büchse der Pandora* (*Pandora's Box*). These two plays are

sometimes performed separately, but may be combined together, as Wedekind originally planned them to be, and performed as one compressed and compelling work of theatre.⁹ Taken together, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box* chart, in a series of dramatic episodes, the rise and fall of a vital and lovely young woman, Lulu. Like Eliza Doolittle in Shaw's *Pygmalion*, Lulu has been picked up from off the streets (where she has been selling flowers outside the Alhambra Café) and taken in by Schön, her rich protector. The settings in these two plays show the arc of Lulu's downfall. As Act One begins, she is still the young and secret mistress of Schön but is now also the pampered wife of an uxorious elderly doctor, Doctor Goll. In that familiar link between commerce and culture Lulu is in an artist's studio having her portrait painted. By the end of *Earth Spirit*, Lulu has inherited Schön's luxurious 'renaissance style' German villa, and her three ex-husbands, Goll the physician, Schwartz the portrait painter, and Schön the capitalist newspaper proprietor, are all deceased. In *Pandora's Box* however, Lulu's decline is rapid. The play opens in the same solid German villa as before, but soon moves even further up the social scale to a large opulent Paris salon complete with dining and gambling rooms and tall mirrors reflecting bejewelled guests. Chillingly, in the final scene of *Pandora's Box*, Lulu has been reduced to living in a damp and 'broken down' basement room in London, working unsuccessfully as a prostitute, her humiliation complete.

Described baldly like this the combined Lulu plays sound like a simple medieval morality play, and to some extent they are, but there is far more going on with them than this, and it is this 'far more' that I am interested in. Lulu is the protagonist of the two plays just as Joseph Pawelka is to be the protagonist of my own work. And yet Lulu is also a product of her own society, as Joe was of his, and the plays are as much about the prosperous capitalist society of the period as they are about Lulu herself. Wedekind is merciless in his depictions of the social attitudes and mores of the time and place – Germany and later France and London in the late 19th century. This world of bourgeois stuffy Germany, France of the Paris Commune and rat-ridden 'Jack the Ripper' haunted London has now gone for good, just as the muddy unpaved streets of Palmerston North and the constant smoke from the burning bush that surrounded the small raw town have now disappeared. But human nature does not change, and the pride, hypocrisy and greed of Wedekind's characters are qualities that are still immediately recognisable. The playwright is satirically showing his audiences to themselves in this work. But the plays are never earnest pieces of social realism. Instead, the Lulu plays are outrageously theatricalised works that are at once ludicrous, savage, funny, risqué and sometimes touching. Even on first reading I enjoy that stylised theatricality, and the way the

Lulu plays are never straitjacketed by the need for realism or verisimilitude. Already, I am considering how I can use this theatricality in *Smoke and Mirrors*.

The plays are slippery and difficult to pin down. Are they comedy bordering on tragedy, or burlesque bordering on farce with episodes of *Grand Guignol*? Lulu is the pivot of the plays, and always their central character, and yet it has been suggested that it is the lesbian Countess Geschwitz who loves Lulu unrequitedly and willingly sacrifices herself for her, who is the true tragic heroine.¹⁰ It is part of the chameleon charm of these plays that they can be interpreted in so many different ways, and that with a committed and energetic cast they can still ‘work’ years after they were first written.

However, I am intrigued most by the look and style of these plays and by the craft of their playwright. I am reading *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora’s Box* in order to learn what I can about Wedekind’s use of myth and allegory in the plays, and also his use of non-naturalistic techniques of staging and setting. I look closely first at how Wedekind builds myth into his work. Lulu is the eponymous ‘earth spirit’ of the play – seductively lovely and unfettered, she is a kind of eternal feminine. Each of her several partners sees her differently. It is significant that each man has a different pet name for her – ‘Nellie’ ‘Mignon’ ‘Eve’ ‘Lulu’. She is the object of their private fantasies, a kind of tabula rasa on whom they project their own wishes and desires. Even her disreputable old father Schigolch scarcely knows who she really is. He admires her beauty, and its earning capacity for himself and others.

SCHIGOLCH (*Stroking her knee*) What do you do all day? Are you still learning French?

LULU I lie around and sleep.

SCHIGOLCH That shows you’ve got class. – What else?

LULU (*Stretching sinuously*) I stretch till my bones crack.

SCHIGOLCH L-o-v-e-l-y bones ... ¹¹

Hence Lulu herself can be seen in a multitude of ways. In different lights she is the naïve victim of a male dominated society, a courageous young woman living on her own terms, a destructive vamp, an exploitable wayward child, or an amoral free spirit. In depicting Lulu as sex and love incarnate Wedekind has associated her with some of the great myths of western

civilization. With Pandora, who unloosed all the sins and evils of the world when she opened that fateful box. With Eve, partner and lover of Adam before the Fall and the mother of all mankind. The association of Lulu with Eve in the Garden of Eden is strengthened still further by Wedekind's framing device of a Prologue where Lulu is first presented to us as a caged serpent dressed in a 'glittering, skin tight, one piece suit.'

The RINGMASTER cracks his whip again; the ASSISTANT opens the cage and takes LULU out: she coils herself sinuously around his body.

RINGMASTER She's made to dazzle and delight
 Out here she's harmless but step inside
 And see her fight a tiger.
 She'll coil herself around him,
 He'll roar – who'll win?
 Step inside and see the wild animals. 12

However, whether Lulu is seen as a snake, an erotic beauty, or a spoilt child, whoever plays her must be able to show her irresistibility. Ironically, when he created her Wedekind could not have known that she would give rise to one of the most potent myths of the 20th century – woman as sex symbol, both amoral and adored. Louise Brooks in Pabst's classic silent film *Pandora's Box*¹³ was an early screen goddess, and the legend of film star Marilyn Monroe and her vulnerable and seductive beauty stays with us to this day.

As I read and reread various versions of the Lulu plays they seem on the surface to be strident, satirical, and grotesquely disjointed, and yet I gradually come to realise that beneath this surface each play is subtly unified, not by story line which is episodic at best, but by allegory and symbol. This contrast between the harsh garish surface of the plays and their subtle underpinnings interests me, so I examine it further. The portrait of Lulu dressed as a Pierrot is a powerful linking symbol in the plays. It appears in almost every scene, and, in reverse of Wilde's picture of Dorian Gray,¹⁴ shows Lulu still radiant and fresh as her fortune and beauty decline. The portrait moves to many different situations. We first see it on an easel in Schwarz the painter's studio, then above the fire place in the 'elegant drawing room' of the house she shares with him. In Schön's well-appointed German villa the picture is in 'an antique frame'. When Lulu is in gaol for the murder of Schön it is covered with a dust cover, while in the glittering Paris salon where Lulu's options finally run out and Casti-Piani gives her the miserable choice between returning to prison or working in a Cairo brothel, the portrait is set firmly into a wall. Even in the dismal garret of the final scene, the rescued picture is still shown, cut out from its frame and brought there as a rolled up piece of canvas

by the devoted Countess Geschwitz. It is almost as though the portrait is Lulu herself – a commodity ‘framed’ in different ways by the men who have associated with her. That she is dressed as a Pierrot, with its suggestion of pretty doll, plaything or clown, in the portrait would not have been incidental.

The most mysterious character of the plays and almost their only survivor is Lulu’s father, the old reprobate Schigolch. Incurribly venal and in need of a good wash, but generally well tolerated by his daughter, he shuffles in and out of the action asking for money. He is a source of mordant humour but he also seems to operate on an allegorical level - as a kind of ‘Father Death’ figure who predicts what is coming for Lulu and says the things no one else will say.

SCHIGOLCH We’re still filth.

LULU Speak for yourself. I want to be good enough to eat.

SCHIGOLCH (*rising*) Just you wait, my girl, your admirers won’t always think you’re such a tasty dish. Whilst there’s a bit of go in you it’s fine. (*He comes behind her and pulls her hair.*) But afterwards they’ll serve up your carcass for dogmeat.
The front door bell rings off. SCHIGOLCH shuffles away.

SCHIGOLCH I’ll find my own way out.

LULU You’ve got enough money?

SCHIGOLCH Enough to buy myself a wreath.

He exits Up Stage Centre at a fast wheezing shuffle. ... ¹⁵

Mirrors are a significant motif of *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora’s Box*, and I am drawn to this because mirrors give the potential for multiple reflections, and the mood of carnival and distortion that can sometimes surround them makes mirrors a rich source of imagery. I have already decided to use them in my own play, as well as in the title.

In the first act of *Lulu*, Scenes Two and Three begin with Lulu regarding herself in a curving wall of mirrors. Scene Three ends with her posing in front of the same mirrors ‘*dazzling in black underwear and a white bride’s veil.*’ Here, Lulu acts as a kind of Narcissus figure, constantly checking her appearance, and asking how she looks. It is as though her reflection is more ‘real’ than she is. Hence this little interchange with Alwa, Schön’s son.

LULU When I see myself in a mirror, I want to be a man. My own husband.
ALWA I know. To enjoy the happiness you give him. ¹⁶

But Lulu's days of happiness are already numbered. *Pandora's Box* begins in the dark with the spotlight on 'a monstrous swaying image of LULU in a fairground distorting mirror dressed in a prison smock and behind bars.' Scene Two in the Paris salon opens with a spotlight shining on a whole bank of distorting mirrors, with men and women in death masks waltzing in front of them to form a kind of grotesque Dance of Death. Lulu in a white Directoire gown is seen briefly in the central mirror, dancing with the saturnine Marquis Casti-Piani before the stage lights go up to show 'a spacious drawing room with tall mirrors everywhere.' The final scene of the play has Lulu in a torn black dress again in the spotlight, soliciting in front of a 'large shattered distorted mirror.'

Lulu does not say much in these plays, she does not have to. In the Lulu plays Wedekind is reflecting back to us the farcical, the cruel, the venal, aspects of our society. Mirrors are a concrete symbol of this reflection. They chart Lulu's progress to destruction.

The plays are so unashamedly theatrical that the text is only one small element of their composition. Lighting, setting, costume, choreography and music all add to their effectiveness. *Lulu* begins with blaring circus music and a ringmaster with a whip shouting through a megaphone. The circus animal motif continues throughout the play, with circus music (increasingly distorted) striking an ironic note at the beginnings of most scenes. The Prologue has already shown us Lulu herself as a wild creature in a cage, and she says to her father that she has become an animal.¹⁷

I decide that what I enjoy most of all about the plays is their disjunctions – the way they can quickly change mood and dip from satirical farce and high comedy to a stage littered with corpses. Wedekind's Lulu plays have a kind of preposterous verve – fast moving, larger than life and brilliantly able to show the audience what is going on without long wordy explanations. A play in this style would need a cast with skill and flair to perform it, but it's still enormously appealing to think about writing one ...

Bertolt Brecht and *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* ¹⁸

Mahagonny is a work from Brecht's early 'apprenticeship' period that still shows the influence of his iconoclastic predecessors Strindberg and Wedekind. However I choose to study it because in this work Brecht is constantly striving to create a new theatrical form of his own.¹⁹ As I begin to think about my own play I plan to look closely at this form, and to see the theatrical techniques Brecht uses to shape his own works to such sharp and telling effect.

A recording in English of *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* proves hard to get hold of so I listen instead to a German version. The opera is catchy and compelling, with Brecht's words and Weill's haunting music in perfect (dis)harmony. Even in this German language recording there is no doubt at all as to what is going on in the story. I re-read the text in English,²⁰ then finally (through the Toi Whakaari New Zealand Drama School Library) manage to obtain a DVD recording of the Los Angeles Opera's February 2007 production,²¹ and am able to see and hear this strong and cynical work for the first time.

Like Wedekind's, *Earth Spirit* and *Pandora's Box*, *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* ('the city of nets or snares') is, at first acquaintance, a morality tale – a parable of the evils of a bourgeois society where capitalism is rampant and everything is for sale. Somewhere in a mythical mock-American Wild West, Fatty the Book-keeper, Trinity Moses, and Leocadia (Lady-bird) Begbick, three fugitives from justice, decide to found a pleasure city - a peaceful paradise in the American wilderness where the three of them will be able to escape the law and where each new inhabitant will have fun doing just as he or she pleases. Their paradise city of Mahagonny is soon established but its fortunes begin to fluctuate and the city narrowly escapes a destructive hurricane. All the residents of Mahagonny, prostitutes, lumberjacks, and criminals, are undeterred by this cosmic warning and carry on defiantly with what they call the four pleasures of life - Eating, Lovemaking, Fighting and Drinking – and with the philosophy that nothing they want to do should be forbidden them. In Mahagonny everything, even love, is reduced to a commodity to be bought sold or traded. In Mahagonny, anything you want should be taken. The only crime in Mahagonny is to be out of money. The results of all this hedonism and cut-throat capitalism are predictable. Jimmy Mahoney, the lumberjack hero from Alaska, is sentenced to death for running out of money and is executed by his fellow citizens. Mahagonny itself becomes faction ridden and is ultimately burnt down and destroyed.

I appreciate Brecht's savage satire of a money-obsessed society, and also his cleverly satirical subversion of the opera genre itself. However, I am not so much interested in the work's satirical edge - rather, I want to look closely at Brecht's use of 'distancing' devices in this opera as I am keen to incorporate some of these into my own play.

Verfremdungseffekt ('Estrangement' effect)

As I begin on researching and planning *Smoke and Mirrors* I reflect that I would like the play to be more than just entertainment, and the audience more than merely passive recipients. Hence although I still want the audience to be involved with Joseph Pawelka and with Lizzie his estranged wife, I am keen to strip the work of much of its familiarity as an old local story. I want *Smoke and Mirrors* to unsettle the audience and to make them alert and curious as to what is going on, so that instead of just sinking back in their seats, they are able to think and reason for themselves as they watch Joe's story unfold.

Brecht adopted or devised for himself a number of theatrical techniques to emotionally distance his audiences from the action, and he put many of these into practice in *Mahagonny*. A variety of methods such as the direct address of a character to the audience; the judicious use of harsh bright lighting and placards on stage; the use of songs to interrupt the action, and of stage directions spoken aloud to the audience, all produced what Brecht termed an 'estrangement' effect from the self-contained world of the play. I study these techniques closely, and I discover that these 'de-familiarising' methods have an added advantage for a playwright in that, as well as making the ordinary and familiar into something arresting and strange, they may also serve to reinforce and clarify for the audience exactly what is happening on stage.

Text

One such method involves Brecht's use of explanatory text on stage, either as spoken words or printed on signs, placards and backcloths. Before, and often after, most of the scenes of the opera a short summary of what is happening in that scene is either recited to the audience by an actor or else projected up on to a sign at the back of the stage. As an illustration, at the beginning of Scene Ten Brecht's stage instructions read:

In enormous letters on the backcloth appears: TYPHOON! and then:

A HURRICANE THREATENS MAHAGONNY.

Similarly, at the start of Scene Eleven ‘**During this dreadful night an untutored lumberjack called Jimmy Mahoney had a vision in which the laws of human happiness were revealed to him**’ is either recited or written on a backcloth or large sign.

In Scene Thirteen, as Guzzler Jake the Lumberjack proceeds to eat himself to death, a huge sign behind him reads simply ‘**EATING**’. It would be hard for the audience to miss the moral and satirical force of this little scene

JAKE: Watch me! Watch me! Would you have guessed
 How much one person can eat?
 In the end I shall have a rest.
 To forget is sweet.
 More please! Give me more ...
 He topples over dead.
 The Men form a half-circle behind and remove their hats

although Brecht here again keeps the audience thinking as the chorus sings, not with sorrow as expected, but of how happy Jake was, as his corpse is carried off stage.

CHORUS ... Smith lies dead in his glory
 Smith lies dead in his happiness ... 22

Pictorial Images

Brecht was not the first writer or theatre director to use images as well as words projected on to backcloths on stage but in *Mahagonny* he makes particularly effective use of this technique. For example at the opening of Scene Three as Fatty, and Trinity Moses go to the big city to spread the news of the founding of their new ‘Jerusalem’ a backcloth appears showing a view of a smoky metropolis and a photomontage of men’s faces. A chorus of men sing or chant together of the miseries of their present lives:

MEN We dwell in dark cities: miles of sewers below them;
 Thick over them smoke; in them nothing at all.
 No peace, no joy: here is no soil to grow them;
 Here we will quickly fade. More slowly they also shall fall.

Fatty and Trinity Moses enter with placards

Brecht then makes it clear to the audience that Fatty and Trinity Moses and their placards have managed to entice settlers to Mahagonny by beginning Scene Four with the printed words ‘**The next few years saw the discontented from every country making their way towards Mahagonny**’. ²³

Similarly, in the scene of the hurricane, Scene Twelve, a large arrow is displayed on the backcloth. The arrow is shown moving steadily towards Mahagonny while the anxious citizens watch. Every so often as the storm gets nearer a disembodied voice from a loudspeaker makes an announcement. The stage instructions read (in part):

*... Third loudspeaker announcement: The hurricane’s speed is increasing; it is now making straight for Mahagonny. All the lines to Mahagonny are now down.
In Pensacola 11,000 are reported dead.*

All are watching the arrow, horror struck. Suddenly, a minute’s distance from Mahagonny, the arrow stops. Then the arrow makes a rapid half-circle around Mahagonny and moves on. ... ²⁴

With visual techniques such as this, Brecht’s audiences do not need a great deal of verbal exposition to allow them to understand what is happening, and the writing is tight and economical in consequence.

Language and style

Now I am becoming familiar with the opera I begin to look more and more closely at the style of language Brecht uses to tell his story. *Mahagonny* is never ‘flabby’. Speeches or songs are short and the words are tough, lively, and always accessible, though the work is filled with a multiplicity of ironies. I like this style of writing very much. It is the style I will be aiming to follow as I begin writing my own play.

Images, emblems, phrases and choruses echo and re-echo through the opera. This repetition ties the work together and gives it depth and resonance. ‘Moon of Alabama’ is just such an emblem. When we first meet Jenny Jones and the six other girl prostitutes ‘*carrying large suitcases*’ on their way to the pleasure city of Mahagonny, they sit on their suitcases and sing *The Alabama Song*:

Oh, show us the way
to the next whisky bar ...

with its hook lines

... Oh Moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye.
We've lost our good old mama
And must have whisky
Oh, you know why. ²⁵

In Scene Four, Jimmy, Jake, Bill and Joe, the four lumberjacks from Alaska pick up this image and repeat it three times in their song:

Green and lovely
Moon of Alabama
Shine for us!

In Scene Eleven, the night of the hurricane and a night of almost certain death Jenny sings *softly and sadly* Oh Moon of Alabama ... almost as a charm against danger.

Similarly, at the ending of the opera where a group of girls bear the dead Jimmy's watch, revolver and cheque book on a linen cushion, and also *his shirt on a pole*, in a kind of slow and pseudo-ritualistic march, they sing the now sadly ironic refrain.

Oh, Moon of Alabama
We now must say goodbye.
We've lost our good old mama
And must have dollars
Oh, you know why. ²⁶

Several of the same choruses occur and re-occur throughout *Mahogany*, with one refrain in particular summing up the pleasure-obsessed city of Mahagonny, and any similar society built on money, permissiveness and greed.

As you make your bed so you lie on it
The bed can be old or brand new
So if someone must kick, why that's my part
And another gets kicked, that part's for you! ²⁷

Brecht's didactic point is spelt out repeatedly like this, but the chorus theme is always adroitly woven into the action so that it reinforces Brecht's message but does not cloy despite several re-hearings. A second chorus sung at different times by various groups of men to describe the hedonistic philosophy of the inhabitants of Mahagonny works in a similar fashion.

One means to eat all you are able
Two, to change your loves about;
Three means the ring and gaming table;

Four, to drink till you pass out.
Moreover, better get it clear
That Don'ts are not permitted here. ²⁸

I am coming to realise that *Mahagonny* as a whole has a near Old Testament revivalist *Dies Irae* feeling. As well as the repeated choruses the work has many biblical sounding incantatory passages. Indeed, in a neat kind of *deus ex machina* God himself comes to Mahagonny in the form of the play its citizens perform for the condemned Jimmy as he sits in the electric chair. Ironically, the people of Mahagonny will never let God drag them off to Hell because they have concluded that they are in Hell already:

JENNY *through a megaphone*
Saw God, they did, the people of Mahagonny:
No, answered the people of Mahagonny. ²⁹

JIMMY I ate and remained unsatisfied; I drank and became all the thirstier. ³⁰

This is heightened condensed language with biblical overtones and with unexpected inversions ('Saw God, they did') that render the language strange to us.

Brecht's deliberate juxtaposition of down-to-earth and colloquial language - 'come on, cough up the money' 'Moses, keep slugging/ Make him swallow dirt!' 'This is the spot for us. Any objections?' - with the heightened poetry of the bible and the prayer book lifts *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* into a work of satirical bite and dimension. *Mahagonny* was written as a parable and the events described in it are completely farcical, and yet the lessons of Mahagonny could equally apply to Brecht's Weimar Germany, to 'Wild West' America, or to any world city even today whose citizens are preoccupied with pleasure and the difficulties of paying for it.

Music

I cannot leave *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny* without giving some consideration to the music which is such an integral part of the opera. Mordant and telling as it is, it is hard to imagine Brecht's libretto without Kurt Weill's marvellously jazzy and accessible score. The music in *Mahagonny* is music for the stage rather than the opera house. It is deeply influenced by popular musical style, with non-classical instruments such as the accordion and the American jazz saxophone all included in the mix. Songs, such as 'The Alabama Song'

are catchy, and easily remembered and would have been hummed by many of the audience on their way out of the theatre. And yet, in accordance with the satirical and didactic purpose of the opera and Brecht's need to distance rather than to emotionally involve the audience with the action, Weill's carefree music can just as often become deliberately discordant. Alternatively, on occasions such as the final scene of the opera, Weill's music is determinedly light hearted while the action on the stage is grim. (Here the girl prostitutes once more reprise the Alabama Song while a group of men carry Jimmy's corpse slowly across the stage.) Such disjunctions are unsettling for the audience. They can never be completely sure of the implications of what is happening before their eyes, and so must concentrate deeply rather than relax.

After studying Weill's music, and being aware of the extra dimensions it adds to the theatrical impact of *Mahagonny* as a whole, I am convinced of the power of music in theatre and am determined to use popular music in my play, either to amplify the action, or to play against it in some way. I also plan to use some of those theatrical techniques that Brecht first began to develop in *Mahagonny*. I am keen to write with economy, and to use ritual and repetition where I can use it to advantage in my new play. I will also incorporate back projections of words or pictorial images or maybe even both of them to enhance the action on stage. But before I settle down to begin writing I have one further work of theatre to read, see and study.

Mervyn Thompson and *Children of the Poor*

Thompson's *Children of the Poor*³¹ is an adaptation for theatre of John A. Lee's 1934 novel of the same name.³² The novel, and hence the play, are each built around the early experience of Albany Porcello and his family as they struggle to get enough to eat, and to survive with some sort of personal integrity in cold working class Dunedin. Labour politician John A. Lee based the Porcellos, - the impressionable young boy Albany, his mother Bella, his sister Rose, and younger brother Douglas - on himself and his own family, so that the novel is largely autobiographical. It is a 'getting of wisdom' novel. Accordingly, Mervyn Thompson describes 'his' *Children of the Poor* as 'Albany's story, and his path from innocence to grim experience.'³³

I choose to study this play for three reasons. Firstly, *Children of the Poor* is based on a real story. In my play *Smoke and Mirrors*, I am seeking to tell a real story about real people, many

of whom will be named characters in the play I eventually write. Secondly, unlike Wedekind's *Lulu* plays and Brecht's *Mahagonny*, *Children of the Poor* is a New Zealand story, and is set around the first decade of the 20th century – the Edwardian period when my 'real' character Joseph Pawelka came so disastrously to public notice. Thirdly, *Children of the Poor* as a stylised non-realistic play about 'real' people and 'real' events is the kind of theatre I am most interested in and I wish to explore it further in my own playwriting. I like it that *Children of the Poor* stands within a distinct tradition of non-naturalistic theatre – from Büchner, through Strindberg, Wedekind and Brecht and many other playwrights. (When Thompson speaks of influences on the writing of this play he says 'Brecht is there **of course**, only a fool would miss that...' before going on to suggest Antonin Artaud, Peter Weiss's play *Marat/Sade*, and the Royal Shakespeare Company's presentation of *Nicholas Nickleby* as other significant shaping influences.)³⁴ No playwright writes in isolation. I would like my work to be set in this non-naturalistic tradition.

Coming to grips with *Children of the Poor*

I begin by reading Thompson's play *Children of the Poor*; then read John A. Lee's novel of the same name, and after this, its sequel *The Hunted* (1936) which continues the story of young Albany (Lee) and tells of his incarceration in Burnham Industrial School and his several periods as an escapee and fugitive on the run.³⁵ Finally, I read Mary Isabella Lee's achingly proud memoir of the family's early life *The Not So Poor* (1992).³⁶ I am by now drenched in Lee family history, but it is enough to tell me that John A. Lee's expressive novel with its wealth of incidents, is a gift to any playwright, and also that Thompson's adaptation is faithful to both the spirit and the events of the original text.

What I am keen to learn most from the play *Children of the Poor* is how Thompson tells Albany's story. I know that no matter how non-naturalistic *Smoke and Mirrors* becomes, I am still telling Joseph Pawelka's story, and I am telling it first of all to his own community, the Manawatu. I have a responsibility to Joseph and to the community to tell it as honestly as I can. Hence I read *Children of the Poor* for a second and third time, looking closely at how Thompson moves Albany from innocence to experience, from a small sensitive boy who is moulded by poverty and by social hypocrisy into a truant and a defiant adolescent thief.

The play is divided into two acts and these acts are further divided into brief unnumbered scenes that constantly change venue from 'home' in Athol Place Dunedin, to pastoral

‘Riversdale’ (with grandparents Sandy Stuart (SANDY) and Alice Macdonald (BIG MOTHER), and then back to ‘school’ in Dunedin, and ‘work’ in the boot shop and in the print factory. The variety of these and other scenes and their short episodic nature could have loosened the play and made it hard to follow, but Thompson has added one significant element to tie the play together – the Chorus. I begin to realise that Thompson’s chorus is crucial to this play and I examine it carefully to see how and where he has used it. In his ‘Author’s Note’ at the beginning of the play Thompson says ‘... it is the job of the chorus to provide music, sound effects, character, atmosphere, focus, and above all a sense of participation in Albany’s life journey. ...’ and later ‘... The best way to approach the choral characters is to think of them (a) as socially committed story-tellers ... and (b) as the ‘alter egos’ of Albany Porcello.’³⁷ Certainly, the members of the chorus give the play depth and a kind of rich aural texture as they sing, cry, chant, harmonise, drone, and produce bird song, drum beats and Presbyterian hymns in full measure.

But the chorus (made up of six actors in the play’s first performance)³⁸ does more than this. Individually and collectively they play a large variety of characters – Sandy Stuart the baker, Miss Mason the school teacher, Mr Axeldeen the chaplain, school children, workmen, policemen, factory hands, truant officers and many others - slipping quickly in and out of different roles and angles of view. In the multiplicity of these characters, they create the larger world of the play.

The chorus also provide much of the narrative drive of *Children of the Poor*, and they do this in a variety of ways. I look closely to try to tease out how the chorus ‘tells’ Albany Porcello’s story. The more I look at this however, the more complex it becomes. Often the chorus acts as both Narrator(s) and Chorus almost at the same time. For example: (The baker in Dunedin has given Albany some bread and four half-crowns to take home to his mother. Albany puts one of the half-crowns into his own pocket)

NARRATORS: *moving accusingly behind ALBANY as he hoes into the bread:* About the other half-crown Albany said nothing./ tired of the eternal monotony of stale bread and treacle./ He spent the money on a vulgar gorge./ Time, the healer, would never wipe away the stain:

CHORUS: It was the rottenest act of his life! [*Consumed with guilt, Albany has lost interest in the bread. He returns home.*]³⁹

In their role as ‘socially committed’ story-tellers the chorus on occasions warn Albany - as in the schoolroom (Barbara Freitche) sequence where the chorus lean in to advise the dreaming Albany:

CHORUS: Only a fool tells the truth. ⁴⁰

Or later, when Albany is sacked from his job as a newspaper delivery boy for stealing the account money, they warn and predict:

CHORUS: You will end up in jail. In jail. In jail.

The Chorus continues in the ensuing blackout. ⁴¹

The Chorus utterances may be critical and at times even cruel, but throughout the play they are on Albany’s side. They are his ‘alter ego’ as Thompson describes it. For example:

NARRATORS: *watching ALBANY in a combination of prophetic knowledge and sympathy:*

The great opportunity had rotted to its core./ The ladder had been kicked out from under his feet./ He was free of the poison of malicious tongues/ but he had lost confidence in himself and his future.

ALBANY What have I done? What have I done? I loved that job. ... ⁴²

At times Albany and the Chorus interact together in an odd kind of litany:

CHORUS: Porcello was desperate.

ALBANY: Seriously he considered suicide!

PAPER BOY: *as ALBANY falls back in his arms:* Daily Ti-i-i-mes! Daily Ti-i-i-mes!
Small boy washed up on Otago beach!

PAPER BOY 2, *with actions:* Sta-a-ar! Sta-a-ar! Small boy churned up by ship’s
propeller! ...

ALBANY, *after a pause:* Nah! That’s silly!

CHORUS: Yeah! ⁴³

At other times, the chorus set the scene of the play physically:

CHORUS: They went to a Chinese Den/ Which festered near the Heart of the City.

Three CHORUS MEMBERS Tai Chi their way into a position where, backs to the audience, they make up a doorway. ⁴⁴

Later in the play, in a climactic scene, Axeldeen the Chaplain takes out a hard leather belt and whips Albany savagely. With each stinging blow, members of the chorus, armed with their own leather belts, thwack the floor fiercely and cry out. At the end of this whipping stage directions read:

[A final thwack and the bloodlust is over, ALBANY falls away. Sobbing, the CHAPLAIN gathers him in his arms. Below, the flailing CHORUS is panting from a different kind of exhaustion.] ⁴⁵

In this flogging scene the role of the chorus is complex. Firstly they provide some telling sound effects – a grim accompaniment to what is happening on stage. Secondly they extend and amplify what is happening to Albany – his individual agony is a shared and therefore a larger one. However, in their enthusiastic ‘thwacking’ and their ‘panting’ after the event they also seem to be identifying with Albany’s tormenter, the unpleasant Mr Axeldeen. Here the role of the chorus is somewhat slippery and ambiguous. As the scene ends the chorus give an ironic echoing reminder of Albany’s unhappy experience in the Chinese Den:

CHAPLAIN, *finally:* Get dressed. [ALBANY gets his clothes on but his eyes never leave the Chaplain.] I’ll ... make some tea.

CHORUS, *Chinese echo:* Have a cup of tea, leetle boy. ⁴⁶

Thus, in *Children of the Poor*, the chorus seem to be all things to all men. Along with Albany the central character, they are the hardest working actors in the play. They instantly become any extra characters needed to fill out the action. They are also commentators, sympathisers, criticisers, physical scene-setters, providers of music and all of the sound effects. Above all they are story-tellers who are able to pick up the narrative and embellish it or drive it forward when needed. I spend a lot of time mulling over this kind of flexible story-telling with a chorus, because I am keen to use it, or at least some aspects of it, in my own theatre play *Smoke and Mirrors*.

There is a further aspect of Thompson’s story-telling in this play that I would like to examine closely. In a deliberately Brechtian ‘distancing’ effect he has separated the narration out into first and third person. Hence individual characters often speak of themselves in the third person. Here is Rose, Albany’s sister:

ROSE: He's so soft, thought Rose, but one day he'll turn out just like me.
Tough. Tempered in Hell. [*she exits*] ⁴⁷

And here is Douglas, Albany's 'good' younger brother defending himself:

DOUGLAS: He liked going to bible class, and visiting the houses of respectable children! ⁴⁸

Occasionally and unexpectedly characters break the 'fourth wall' of the play and speak directly to the audience.

MOTHER, *to audience*: He was always sorry. Afterwards. ⁴⁹

Saint Nick, Albany's teacher, after a schoolroom scene suddenly doubles his age to around 70 years and delivers his judgement on a protégé directly to the audience:

SAINT NICK: '... Douglas was something of a plodder. But Albany should have been head of the class! Really, he was the most disappointing boy I ever taught. [*Snaps his book shut and leaves.*] ⁵⁰

Children of the Poor is a bleak story, made still more bleak by its depiction of the hypocrisy and social conformity of the era, and of the steadily downward trajectory of the Porcello family. However, Thompson has leavened the play with lively physical mime and with occasional touches of broad, almost slapstick, humour. In the Boot Shop sequence of Act 2 Albany and the chorus march proudly off to his first day's work, with the chorus singing Kipling's well known 'Boots' song:

CHORUS: ... Boots-boots-boots-boots movin' up and down again
There's no discharge in the war.

Later, as the boredom of his job as errand boy with nothing useful to do sinks in, the Narrators express his feelings to the audience.

NARRATORS: *with actions*: Boots, boots, boots./ He extracted them from shelves,/ Dusted them,/ Returned them,/ Extracted them again./ He dusted them until he could see nothing but boots./ He began to envision the future as a long avenue of undusted boots that stretched from horizon to horizon!/
Next, a 'crazy ritual' follows with the boot shop manager and his assistant the nasal youth constantly swapping sides so that Albany, in the middle, 'has his head on a horizontal yoyo.'

NASAL YOUTH: Good morning!
MANAGER: Carry out the boots!
NASAL YOUTH: Dust the boots!
MANAGER: Carry in the boots!
NASAL YOUTH: You can go home now!
MANAGER: Good evening!
NASAL YOUTH: Good morning!
MANAGER: Carry out the boots! ... ⁵¹

This is pure ‘Keystone Cops’ and broadly funny. Other sequences in the play further the story in mime, as in the ‘yelling match without words’ between the shamefaced baker, Albany’s mother and the angry baker’s wife.

... The MOTHER screams back at them both – clearly there will be no more favours from the BAKER. Finally she picks up an axe and threatens him. The BAKER and his WIFE run off, screaming. ...

ALBANY, *to audience*: What a queer tangle. What’s it all about? I don’t understand! ⁵²

This use of mime is a vivid and economical way of story-telling, and it does work in this play. Thompson seems to have used nearly every non-naturalistic means at his disposal to tell the story of Albany Porcello, and, although he never seems to get below Albany’s skin or give his character more than a surface reading, the play is clever, ironic and sad. However, it is time to begin thinking now of my play and of the story I wish to tell.

Part Three

***Smoke and Mirrors* Taking Shape**

By now I have a large file of my own of handwritten notes, photocopied newspaper articles, photographs and other background material on Joseph Pawelka. I know the names of his extended family. I have the dates of his birth and marriage. I know that his unusual surname was changed by his father from 'Pavelka' to 'Pawelka' and that both surnames are almost certainly diminutive versions of Eastern European names for 'Paul' ('Pavel' and 'Pawel'). Pawelka's story is well known, and there is much of it on public record. I have the broad outline of what Joe did in his early life and what the consequences were.

What I still do not understand is why? Is Joe a narcissist, self-obsessed and bristling with every supposed slight or hurt to his person? Or, like Albany Porcello, is he just a young man from a disadvantaged background who is crushed by the social conformity and prejudice of the day and is fighting to retain his individuality in a hostile world? And what of his wife, Lizzie? They were married only a few months. Why did she reject Joe so roundly and refuse to have anything to do with him when he was desperate to see her? These are questions I am still puzzling over as I begin to write the play.

However, what I most wish to tell in this play is the story of the story. Joe may well have brought shame and anguish to his own family and extreme aggravation to the police and prison system, but his story is larger than just the perennially drab 'what happened'. It is a story of magic and of transformation that has gradually worked its way into the national imagination in the way such stories sometimes do. It is as though we need something bigger and more over-arching than our own private experience to fold up and pack away into our collective memory store cupboard. The myth-making around Joe begins building early. In April 1910 as the manacled ex-fugitive arrives at the Palmerston North railway station to attend his trial someone calls out from the milling crowd that has gathered to see him 'You're a hero Pawelka,' and Joe smiles.⁵³

From the beginning the stories about Joe multiply, divide and run together into a larger many-stranded story. Some of them are clearly apocryphal, some are very likely true. In popular imagination Joe is soon reported as immensely strong, he is a black villain, or a smart boy, a prisoner who can escape from any confinement, a decent bloke, a desperado, a man

who can jump amazing heights, a killer and a thief. He is elusive and able to disappear at will, and finally, he performs the ultimate trick and vanishes for good.

It is this magic, this transformation of Joe and his story that I wish to focus on in my play. We say ‘It’s all done with smoke and mirrors’ when we refer to something unexpected, some change or deception that we see with our own eyes but cannot yet rationally explain. I think of Wedekind’s Lulu and those tall distorted mirrors throwing back their increasingly lurid reflections, and I remember Joseph Pawelka’s anger-fuelled night of arson, and the drifting acrid smoke that must have clung around the small town of Palmerston North for days in that cold early winter of 1910. Mirrors, smoke and reflections are blending in my mind. I know how old stories like Joe’s can weave together with newer stories until past and present, ‘then’ and ‘now’, are blended into a kind of ‘anytime’ where anything can happen. I consider then the prejudice, jealousy, gossip, social conformity, admiration and hypocrisy that are the stuff of any small community. I imagine Joe centre stage with large tilted mirrors at the rear and on each side, reflecting back both the people of the Manawatu community of 1910, and the present day Manawatu audience of 2012, in an endless chain of repeated reflections. *Smoke and Mirrors*, I have the title for my play.

***Smoke and Mirrors* The Writing**

*‘One two three four
Joe Pawelka jumped the wall’*

Manawatu playground chant

From the beginning I have wanted to ‘find’ the real Joseph Pawelka - the lonely youth and thwarted alienated young man who ‘jumped the wall’ of convention and propriety. I want to dig beneath the surface and to show him as more than just another troubled twenty-three year old with a bone to pick against the world. Very early in the writing process therefore, before I have even started on the first page, I decide I can best do this by setting much of the play inside Joe’s mind, and that I will tell his story as he sits in his cell reflecting on the events that have lead him to be there. I will place his prison cell centre stage (although it will be a notional cell only, so that he is free to come and go outside as the time and the occasion demand it. Already I know also that the fabric of *Smoke and Mirrors* will be layered, with time and space, past and present, light and shade all overlapping as they do in memories, thoughts and dreams.

I begin the play with Joe in custody for the first time, in the police lock-up in Palmerston North. He is arguing with his cell mate:

JOE ... What would you know.

CELL MATE All I'm saying is, you need to keep your head down. Don't get so shirty with them.

By Scene 2 we are in the Kimbolton Schoolyard as Joe relives some of the events of his childhood. Here he is boasting about his father to his schoolmates. (Even at this time, in his early childhood, physical strength is important to him.)

JOE My father's stronger than your father.

BOY 1 Is not.

JOE Is so.

GIRL 1 He is not!

JOE It's true. It's true! He can lift a hunderd pound sack. On his own.

Short scenes like this give me the opportunity to 'jump around' in Joe's mind in a non-linear fashion and to dramatize events he is recalling so that together they can become a kind of composite picture of his experience. Joe's story is a jumble of the ordinary and extraordinary, the dark and the colourful, the mythic and prosaic, and I want the shape and the form of the play to reflect this. However, there is another important element I wish to bring to *Smoke and Mirrors*.

Vaudeville

The first decade of the 20th century in England, America, and even in far-away New Zealand, was a period of popular entertainment. Audiences in schoolrooms, homes or village halls were still thrilled by magic lantern slides projected on to screens or walls. Music hall in England and vaudeville in America were both flourishing. People flocked to hear risqué or sentimental songs, comic recitations and mass sing-alongs, and to see circus acts, conjurors, contortionists, strongmen, hypnotists and escape artists. Children and adults in town and country alike loved going to 'shows'. In Europe the traditional circus was still as popular as ever and satirical cabaret acts were booming. Frank Wedekind himself worked briefly as a secretary to a travelling circus, and his awareness of the colour and physicality of the circus

became central to his own dramatic vision. The circus and ‘show’ elements in the Lulu plays are an expression of this glittering vitality.⁵⁴

Joseph Pawelka is described by the newspapers of the day as a tough escaper able to vanish almost at will. I decide to bring that side of him into the play – his reckless agility and endurance, and also the dazzle of notoriety that begins to cling about him as soon as his exploits become known. Hence I decide to bring vaudeville and burlesque into the play. Perhaps these colourful and showy elements will portray the brightness and the darkness of Joe’s mind more directly than any linear narrative can. ‘Truth’ and ‘fiction’ will be able to comfortably co-exist in *Smoke and Mirrors*. After all every play of this kind, no matter how closely the writer keeps to the known ‘facts’, can never be entirely real, and must only ever be a re-creation of what happened.

The vaudeville sequences will be larger than life and will be performed directly to the theatre audience. I begin the first one in the middle of Scene 2 where Performer 1 declaims (music hall style) a selection from the comic monologue *Albert and the Lion*.⁵⁵ Later in the same scene Joe repeats a few lines from the monologue to his two siblings and his admiring mother:

JOE You... you could see that the Lion didn’t like it
 For giving a kind of a roll,
 He pulled Albert... inside the cage wiv ‘im
 And swallowed the little lad ‘ole. ...

Here Joe is a smart and loved little boy, rejoicing in words and in his ability to remember them. He is close to his mother, his brother Jack and his sister Agnes, although his father (also Joseph) is conspicuously absent. However, almost immediately we are back in the police cells where the adult Joe has been all the time. The connection between Albert’s cage and his own incarceration becomes clear to him as he muses ‘... and swallowed the little lad ... whole.’

‘Young’ Joe in the play is a schoolboy amateur conjuror and an imaginative story-teller whose exotic tales for his younger siblings pre-figure some of his later fantasies, and the lies he is accused of telling when he is an adult. Both in the play and in real life Joe is an avid reader. He enjoys westerns and shoot-outs and ‘derring do’. He cannot bear cowardice.

I continue the vaudeville sequences throughout the play, with songs, dances and jokes occurring particularly at crisis points in Joe's memory. In Scene 5 Joe's employer, the butchery owner Mr Hampden, sacks him for telling too many lies, while Lizzie his wife also rejects him. When Mother appears as well to accuse Joe of lying, the result is a burst of music and some loud and very jolly theatrical patter:

PERFORMER 1 I say I say I say. Are your relatives in business?
PERFORMER 2 Yes, in the iron and steel business.
PERFORMER 1 Oh, indeed.
PERFORMER 2 Yes, me mother irons and me father steals!
CAST (ALL) Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!

Houdini

I know by now that the legendary showman and illusionist Houdini was at the height of his fame at this period and that he did visit Australia. Indeed, he was one of the first men to make a powered flight in that country when he took the air in his own Voisin biplane at Diggers Rest, north of Melbourne on 18 March 1910. The event was widely documented with photographs and with text.⁵⁶ I begin to think of Houdini as a kind of avatar for Joe or at least for the kind of Joe he always wanted to be – accepted, successful and well off. Both Houdini and Joe are escape artists of a kind. Houdini by his strength and his dedicated application was able to escape from an early life of poverty and from the stigma of being 'foreign'.⁵⁷ He earned his enormous fame through spectacular escapes from locked sets of handcuffs and from a remarkable variety of confined spaces. Strangely also, both Houdini and Joe are reported as being excessively fond of their mothers.⁵⁸

The more I think of him then, the more Houdini becomes an alter ego for Joe, or rather for the shadowy 'Joe' of his own wishes and dreams. I decide to introduce Houdini into my play. In Scene 5 he first sweeps in, full of magic and brio, (although only Joe and the theatre audience can see him.) He and Joe emphasise their twin-ship by speaking in unison.

HOUDINI I defy death. I'm a headline act in vaudeville.
JOE He defies death. He's a headline act in vaudeville.

Now Joe and Houdini become blended together as they speak the next few lines as one.

JOE & HOUDINI I open locks with cunning and with concealed keys. I can get out of riveted boilers, mail bags, milk cans – nothing can hold me. I am a master of illusion. ...

Houdini in the play is as ‘real’ as I can make him. Apart from the last scene of *Smoke and Mirrors* he does nothing, says nothing he has not done or could not have said in ‘real’ life. And yet, he is a figment of Joe’s imagination. He is a metaphor for escape, illusion, and transformation. He is both ‘real’ and ‘not real’ at the same time.

The Chorus

I have already envisaged having a committed and flexible team of actors on stage at all times and able to slip into whatever role is required of them to create the larger world of Joe’s mind and memory. However, the play is more than just Joe’s individual story. In *Smoke and Mirrors* I need to explore the effect of Joe’s law-breaking on the Manawatu community as a whole.

As the hunt for Joe becomes widespread the local people become more and more alarmed and excitable. Police reinforcements pour in to the Manawatu and vigilante searchers increase in number. In the evening dark, when nerves are stretched and identities uncertain, a policeman is shot and killed by a person unknown,⁵⁹ and, appallingly, only one night later a civilian is shot dead by another civilian searcher.⁶⁰ As a result of this confusion the response to Joe’s rampage is described by scoffing and lecturing newspapers from outside the immediate Manawatu as ‘hysterical’.⁶¹ Indeed, while he is on the run Joe terrifies the local populace who think they see him everywhere. He is widely and positively sighted in several different places at once, and crimes are attributed to him that he cannot possibly have committed.

Almost as soon as he is recaptured however, a strange kind of affection and admiration for Joe begins to develop. Local people who once feared Joe now attend meetings and sign petitions calling for a reduction to his harsh 21 year sentence.⁶² He is a social outcast but he is ‘one of ours’ and he has achieved national fame and notoriety. He has broken community rules in a spectacular way - something others may have secretly wished to do but have never dared. In an age of increasing urbanisation and consequent fears of ‘townie’ softness Joe’s dogged resourcefulness in evading capture by the police has brought back echoes of New Zealand’s increasingly distant unruly pioneer past.

But the community view of Joe is more complex even than this. To some of its members he is just an ‘underdog’ deserving of a fairer go from the justice system. Others see him as a type of scapegoat, as the number and scale of his crimes make their own indiscretions seem lighter and more trifling in comparison. To others again he is a kind of solo New Zealand Jesse James - an outlaw figure, both frightening and attractive. Whilst he is at large in the community’s midst, life has an extra intensity and shine. Uniformed police are everywhere, and clusters of neighbours talk over backyard fences. For a while the region is excitingly ‘in the news’, but with Joe safely removed from the community and held in gaol, everyday life in the Manawatu is once again humdrum and domestic. Through all of this period however, the Joseph Pawelka ‘Man Alone’ myth is steadily building. By the time Joe quits gaol to never be found again, he is already a legend.

From the start I have pondered on how to portray this many-stranded response to Joe, and to reflect the developing myths that soon become fashioned around him. I decide to give the community a particular voice of its own. Individual members of the community will become a chorus. They will be dressed in the coats and hats of ordinary people of 1910 New Zealand but their faces will be garishly made up to suggest something other – something more disturbing and odd. I will write for them a kind of heightened and poetic formal language to differentiate it from the colloquial speech heard elsewhere in *Smoke and Mirrors*. The chorus will speak for themselves and tell the audience how much Joe’s coming has affected their ‘ordinary’ everyday lives. Chorus members will also be playing the multitude of small roles required of them for Joe’s story, so they will need to slip in and out of the action, and out of their coats and hats, quickly. They will need to be both energetic and versatile!

I rewrite and restage the opening of the play. It will start not with the argument in Joe’s cell as before, but will begin in darkness with the sound of a single pistol shot and the chorus filing slowly out to stand in a formal line across the front of the stage. Time is always fluid in *Smoke and Mirrors*. At this beginning point Joe has already gone, and the chorus is lamenting his loss:

PROLOGUE

VOICE 1 He was a gift.
ALL Find him, catch him!

VOICE 2 He came to us
 out of the ice and the rain
 and the unforgiving Spring

ALL We are ordinary people
 Of the Manawatu
 Raumai, Feilding,
 Palmerston North
 Ashhurst... .

I now set out to write several further sequences of lines for the chorus. These lines will come at key points in the play, after Joe's night of arson in Palmerston North for example, and after his final disappearance. The chorus generally are not an ironic echo in Joe's mind and they do not comment directly on the action on stage. Instead they speak only for themselves and how they are affected by Joe and his actions. Their comments are nebulous and inchoate and sometimes fearful. They dimly perceive that Joe is a kind of scapegoat for the community

CHORUS We needed him for the lies we told
 The bills unpaid the tears in the kitchen
 The lunatic in the main street. ...

While Joe is around their own sins do not seem so bad. When he disappears they know they have lost something special.

CHORUS We needed him for the bleakness of the days
 the bent back in the milking shed
 the yellow soap in the wash house ...

Now he is gone they are suggesting that their lives are duller and less exciting.

 He was a gift. We needed him.

But the chorus still has some self-awareness, some intimation of the myth making that will follow in Joe's wake, and of their own conscious and unconscious part in it.

 And when we lost him (PAUSE)
 we had to invent him.

The Myth and the Man

To some extent Joe Pawelka was living inside his own myth. He has a habit of self-dramatizing. When Lizzie first leaves him he makes a brief and failed attempt to drown himself in a shallow pool of the Manawatu River, perhaps to demonstrate to her the strength of his affection, or his despair. He feels alienated from society. His own letter (quoted in the play) is signed by him 'A man against the world'.⁶³

He is fascinated by guns. Even as a boy he owns a sawn-off .22 rifle and has made a wooden stock for it.⁶⁴ When he is first arrested, in February 1910, he has a stolen revolver in his possession. He is a crack shot. Joe likes to dress well and steals clothes to enable him to do this. He admires physical courage. At the beginning of his Palmerston North trial in April 1910 he walks defiantly, confidently, and 'almost majestically' into the dock. And yet, he is vulnerable. Two years before his marriage, he has spent five months in Palmerston North hospital with typhoid fever and has endured painful operations to remove a typhoid abscess from one of his lungs. He does not get along with his father, but is very attached to his mother who nursed him back to health, and who may have favoured him as a smart eldest child. He is also excessively attached to his wife Lizzie. His affection for her is his 'Achilles heel' and he cannot leave her alone. All his efforts as he fills their rented house in Church Street with stolen furniture seem to be aimed at enticing Lizzie back to him. In addition, he goes determinedly to try to see her at her mother's place in Ashhurst when it is obvious that the police will be watching the house.

But Lizzie, who has so much power over him, seems half afraid of him, or of what he might do. She may have taken fright at his possessiveness or, once they were married, seen a side of him that she was not aware of during their brief courtship. Lizzie is older than Joe and seems to have spent much of her earlier life living at home with her widowed mother. There is a suggestion that Hannah Wilson considered that Joe was not good enough for her daughter, although the Wilsons too had come from working class stock.

I plan that the first eleven scenes will show mostly the 'real' Joe – lonely, vulnerable, resentful, self-obsessed, both the centre of his own private drama and as a victim of time and circumstance. From Scene 12, as soon as Joe escapes from gaol for the final time, I will concentrate the remaining section of the play on the 'mythical' Joe and the effect he has on

the community as a whole. Once he is gone his legend becomes far more powerful than the slightly built 'thin faced' young man⁶⁵ ever was.

Hence, in Scene 12 as the people of the Manawatu cluster around the stage to remember Joe

Man 1 says: I tell you I did see him. Running along the tops of the ranges, jumping stumps and logs. He had that green slouch hat on and them yellow leggings he must've stolen from Millar and Giorgi's.

MAN 2 Go on. And where were you at the time?

MAN 1 Ashhurst. ...

Now that he is physically absent Joe is already larger than life. (If he were watching from Ashhurst Man 1 could not possibly have seen Joe or anyone else running along the tops of the ranges.)

Similarly, Joe is now becoming used as a bogeyman to frighten children:

DAD ...He'll break open the lock on the door and he'll put you in his big black sack and take you away. That's what he does to bad boys and girls.

CHILD 1 & 2 (DOUBTFULLY) No, Dad.

DAD He's out there in the hills. Maybe he can even hear what we say so by cripes you kids better watch out!

A HUGE SHADOW OF A MAN IS THROWN ON TO THE SCREEN AT THE BACK OF THE STAGE. CHILD 1 & 2 WAIL LOUDLY.

The chorus have almost the last say as they speculate where Joe might have got to. When they conclude he has gone for good they tell how they tried to replace him.

CHORUS We made him out of words
Out of stories we told by the fire
Out of the darkness of winter
Out of the bitterness of Spring

We made him out of our littleness
And we fed him
Until he was the person
We thought we wanted to be

VOICE 1 But he grew larger ...

Scene 13 becomes the apotheosis of Joseph Pawelka as the cast of ‘children’ and adults in the Manawatu see Houdini’s biplane flying over Kimbolton and excitedly conclude that it has come for Joe. Gradually Houdini’s plane fades from the screen at the rear of the stage.

ALL FACE THE SCREEN AND CALL OUT)
Houdini! Houdini! Joe! Wait for us! Don’t go yet! Joe! Please don’t go!

The chorus describes the scene:

CHORUS So that was that.
Joe went soaring up through the clouds. ...

They have no idea where the ‘real’ Joe has got to, but they know they still have his legend, a legend over the following years that they will lovingly polish and embellish.

CHORUS ...But our Joe, he’s still here with us
still changing still growing
and we’re making sure
that we’re keeping him

I end the play with the cast singing ‘Take Shelter’⁶⁶ one of the several New Zealand folk songs composed around Joseph Pawelka and his story. By now Joe has truly left behind the story-telling child and the lonely youth, and become the archetypical ‘Man Alone’, fully embedded in the New Zealand consciousness.

Literary Debts

Smoke and Mirrors emerged with the shape, style and content it did because of the story I wished to tell and the ways that I wished to tell it. However, the construction of the play, its form, its look and its language has been hugely informed by the three theatrical works I chose as my literary models before I began. Now it is time to reflect on and acknowledge the theatrical techniques I have taken from the three works and how I have incorporated these into my own writing project.

I will start with the construction or building of the play. In Wedekind’s two *Lulu plays*, and more particularly, in Brecht’s *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, and Thompson’s *Children of the Poor* there is no traditionally slow linear narrative build-up to a climax, rather

an assembly or mosaic of sometimes very short scenes, often jumping markedly in time and space, and I have followed this system of play-making in *Smoke and Mirrors*, so that the story is told in thirteen brief scenes and without a break of any kind.

As far as individual works go, from Wedekind's *Lulu* plays I have taken, above all the look and feel of the grotesque – the ordinary citizens of the Manawatu with their coats and hats and their garishly painted faces – the judge presiding on high with his starkly white face - the butchers in their stained aprons who confront Joe in his mind and memory. From Wedekind also I have taken the use of symbol and metaphor to unite the play and to give Joe's story its particular resonance.

I have done this directly by using mirrors on stage as Wedekind does (although he uses them to chart the progress of Lulu's downfall whereas I have them primarily to reflect the community back to itself.) Furthermore, just as Wedekind uses circus and animal imagery to describe Lulu, and has her painted portrait as a constant emblem of her alluring beauty, I have used vaudeville, music hall and above all the character of Houdini as a metaphor for the bright and jangling disconnections in Joe's mind, and for performance, trickery and escape.

When I first approached Brecht's *Mahagonny*, I was most interested in the tight economy of his writing, and the sharp disjunctions that can occur when vigorous colloquial language is butted up against words written in a different, or heightened register. I also wanted to learn how to incorporate music, and especially popular song, into a play. Chiefly however, I wanted to examine Brecht's 'distancing' effect – his use of non-naturalistic theatrical methods to keep his audiences alert and thinking. Many of these techniques, in various ways, I have included in *Smoke and Mirrors* – the differing registers of language, from colloquial to poetic, the use of popular songs, skipping rhymes, folk songs and recitations, and particularly, the judicious use of some of Brecht's 'verfremdungseffekt'. Throughout the play the chorus speaks directly to the audience, and, in Scene 11, so does Joe's wife Lizzie. There are back projections of the burning buildings of Palmerston North in Scene 6, and of Houdini's biplane in Scene 13. There is also the potential for different scene settings to be openly indicated by written signs – for example 'ASHHURST' 'KIMBOLTON' 'PALMERSTON NORTH COURT HOUSE', (although that is ultimately a decision to be worked out in consultation with the future director of the play.) *Smoke and Mirrors* is nowhere near as sardonic as

Mahagonny and was written for an entirely different purpose, but Brecht and his non-realistic theatrical style infuse the play nevertheless.

Mervyn Thompson's play '*Children of the Poor*' also is filtered through Bertolt Brecht, so that my literary debt to him is in some respects a debt to Brecht as well. On reflection, what I have appreciated most in Thompson's play and what I have taken from him, is his use of a chorus. My chorus in *Smoke and Mirrors* is similar to Thompson's because it does create the wider world of the play, but it differs in one significant aspect. It is not in any way Joseph Pawelka's 'alter ego'. It is not an ironic echo in Joe's mind and the chorus does not sit in judgement on him. Rather, the chorus in *Smoke and Mirrors* represents the people of the Manawatu, and their uncertain certainties and half-formed hopes and fears as Joe moves around and among them. The chorus members in *Smoke and Mirrors* have a very important function – they are the myth makers and the myth keepers of the Joseph Pawelka legend.

It would be easy, however, to get lost in looking backwards at the different elements that have gone into the making of *Smoke and Mirrors* – the unique combination of historical and literary influences that have brought the play about. But now that the writing of the play is completed I need to be looking forwards. I began this project seeking to make Joseph Pawelka's story once again real and relevant to the Manawatu community, and I will not be able to measure whether I have succeeded in this until the play is performed on stage before a contemporary audience.

Part Four

***Smoke and Mirrors* First Production**

The new play *Smoke and Mirrors* was first performed on 5 October 2012 as part of the biennial Manawatu Festival of New Arts 2012, with Kelly Harris, an established and skilled local drama teacher, as director. The play ran for six performances, the first three at the Drama Studio on the Massey Campus at Hokowhitu, the second three at the Globe Theatre in central Palmerston North. Members of the cast of twelve varied widely, both in age (from high school student to senior citizen) and in stage experience, with some ‘old hands’ and some who were totally new to theatre. I attended as many rehearsals as I could so that I was able to watch the play grow from the first slightly stumbling read through to into the lively ensemble piece that *Smoke and Mirrors* became.

Stage Settings and Theatrical Style

Smoke and Mirrors needed to share the same basic design elements as every other theatrical item in the Festival, so that the ‘mirrors on three sides of the stage’ specified as part of the setting in my original script were not available for this production, but the play was not disadvantaged by this. Stage settings provided were several tall abstract pieces, light enough to be moved yet solid enough to function as the door to Joe’s mother’s house, or the window to the Judge’s bench, (which was set deliberately high up to emphasis the prestige of the Judge and hence the vast economic and social distance between the Judge and Joseph Pawelka, standing down in the dock.) Joe’s cell was centre stage – skeletal enough to be seen into, and open on one side for Joe to easily enter and leave. This central piece (complete with cloth curtains simply drawn or pulled back) also did double duty as the space where Houdini effected his miraculous ‘escapes’ – while the whole ‘cell’ piece was being twirled around by his showgirl assistant, Bess!

The production style was lively and high energy, with the actors making full use of the stage - sometimes jumping, running, or lying spread-eagled while playing noisy games as ‘children’, or balancing on each other’s shoulders, juggling and tumbling in the several vaudeville sequences. Members of the cast moved easily in and out of character and played their multiple parts with energy and enthusiasm. All of them coped well with the two different performance venues.

***Smoke and Mirrors* - Effectiveness?**

On the first night, I watch the confident actors and the focused attentive audience, and think, with relief, yes this play is working. Members of the audience I speak to afterwards are interested and intrigued by what they have just seen. Some, who have previously never heard of Joseph Pawelka ask where they can find more about him. Others want to tell me what they themselves know of the Manawatu outlaw and his chequered history. It seems as if Joe's story still does catch at the imagination and in that respect too, the play works well. However, as I watch each subsequent performance of *Smoke and Mirrors* I realise that I need to go beyond this initial surface impression. Some elements of the play are clearly working better than others. I need to look more closely – firstly at what didn't turn out quite the way I had intended in this production of *Smoke and Mirrors*, and secondly at what doesn't work so well in the play, and why.

From the start I had envisaged *Smoke and Mirrors* as an expressionist play, a work of glare and shadows surrounded by reflective mirrors on three sides of the stage and with elements of the outrageous and grotesque deliberately emblematic of the extremes of light and darkness inside Joseph Pawelka's mind. This production, however, has emerged as a softer and more naturalistic piece of theatre. I ponder on why this has happened. Perhaps I have not put enough cues for the actors and director into the script of *Smoke and Mirrors*. I look at it carefully and see that I could and should have elaborated more on the expressionist style I had intended, especially in the initial introduction to the play. Perhaps also, in an effort to make Joe the character more accessible to the audience, I have made the young story-telling, card trick-playing, 'showing off before his peers' Joe too approachable, and have not sufficiently revealed the darker complexities of his adult psyche.

Neither Joe nor Lizzie in the play have been fully explored as characters. I see now, that I may have been too much intent on telling their story and the larger more mythical story it became, to dig more deeply into their individual psychologies and the complexities of their relationship together. Joe's predilection for arson was bitter and deep-rooted. It is possible, though impossible to tell now, that he was also bi-polar. Why did Lizzie set her face against him when he was so manifestly attached to her, and to his mother, Louisa Pawelka. He broke his mother's heart by never contacting her after he finally disappeared. Was he capable, as most of us are, of episodes of savage and unexpected cruelty towards those he loved best?

As I mull over all these aspects of the play I wrote, or perhaps could have written, I wonder also if in this version of *Smoke and Mirrors* I have been too bound by the real events of Joseph Pawelka's widely documented history. Could I have, instead of telling or re-telling Joe's story as I did, used Joe Pawelka and Lizzie Wilson and their brief and troubled life together as merely a starting point for other literary explorations. It is dangerously easy to get bound by history and 'real' events. This play is a piece of theatre and not a historical treatise. But a further exploration of Joe will have to wait for another time. When I began on the project I set myself the task of finding the terms needed to universalise Joe's story and to make it relevant for a contemporary audience. Have I managed to do this, and to what extent? To find out I need to look at the play critically and dispassionately.

Many aspects of the play worked well. The language was effective and dynamic throughout, with clear contrasts between the colloquially urgent speech of Joe's reconstructed memories and the more reflective and poetic sequences of the chorus. *Smoke and Mirrors*, in this production had great physicality, with the large cast always emotionally 'present' in the play as the actors moved quickly from bursts of lively activity to silent stillness in the shadows at the rear of the stage. At times the cast, as chorus, was grouped by director Kelly Harris into stylised wedge formations or tableaux, at other times the actors joined in some fast moving but carefully choreographed children's 'playing'. In addition, in some sequences of the play at the Globe theatre, they were able to come right out into the auditorium. This lively physicality has huge energy and immediacy and is very watchable for an audience.

***Smoke and Mirrors* What I will change**

I have made the play just a few minutes too long. I did not see this as I was writing the script, but as I watch *Smoke and Mirrors* on stage in real time and with real actors it becomes clear to me. In an attempt to show the local people's reaction to Joe's disappearance and also the mythic figure they made of him, I have unbalanced the shape and rhythm of the play. All of the forward momentum of the piece moves towards Joe's (and Houdini's) final escape, and in the scenes that follow, much of the energy leaks away. It is as though, as it exists now, there are several endings to the play before the final, final one. I realise that I do need to cut some of the text, but am reluctant to sacrifice either the community response to Joe's disappearance or his eventual imagined lift-off in Houdini's Voisin biplane. However, I will look at carefully

cutting some (most?) of the later choral sequences in the play to make a tighter and more effectively balanced work of theatre.

In the longer term, if this play is to have another life, I will look at re-writing some scenes to make Joe and Lizzie fuller and more psychologically complex figures than they are shown to be at present. This will take some thinking about, especially the dynamics of their brief relationship, but I am keen to do it in order to make watching a revised *Smoke and Mirrors* a deeper and richer theatrical experience.

Universality

Did I succeed in my original intention to universalise Joseph Pawelka's story? And what does this 'universality' mean? Strictly speaking, to be universal is to belong to all people or things in the world. What is universal is something we all share, something that is applicable in all situations. In the case of a play such as *Smoke and Mirrors* however, 'universality' implies a kind of theatrical dichotomy. It is a story of one, or several individuals along with all of their human hopes and frailties, but, in the way that the flesh of a peach encloses its stone, this small and personal narrative is contained within a much larger and far more over-arching kind of story. A work such as this that is universal may be set in a particular time and place, but can also transcend these boundaries to become spacious and timeless – a work of myth and archetype containing human truths we all recognise, and to which we all respond.

Looking back over the past few months of writing and the recent days of performance I realise that I have indeed universalised Joe's story to a large degree, and that this has been through a process of literary discovery as well as by direct design. Several different factors have contributed to this universality. Firstly, I am fortunate in my choice of main character. Joseph Pawelka is an ordinary young man who becomes an outlaw and a legend. He is a man whose story is both small and individual and large and mythic. In selecting Joe to write about, I did not need to mythologise him unduly; his own community and those who followed after him had already done so.

Secondly, the non-realistic setting and style of the play have added to its universality. I chose this type of non-realistic theatre in an attempt to reflect the mythological elements of the story and as a direct response to Joe's angry and disordered state of mind, and in these respects the style and setting have worked well. The play is set in the North Island of

New Zealand in the early years of the 20th century but is clearly also set in a kind symbolic space that could be any place, anywhere. There is never any attempt in *Smoke and Mirrors* to make the stage real. Instead, it is an arena of ‘otherness’ and its use is poetic and choreographed.

The treatment of time is also important. We look back at Joe’s life down a long and regular tunnel of a hundred years, but time in the play itself is never that sequential – it stretches and bends, jumps and folds back on itself, and certain events in the play serve to pierce the fabric of time altogether. The character of Houdini suddenly forces his way into the action. Vaudeville characters appear and disappear almost at will when pressures on Joe’s mind and memory become too great to bear. Hence *Smoke and Mirrors* is played out in an arena that is ‘no time’ and any time, as well as in a ‘no place’ that could be any place.

One of the most serendipitous factors in universalising *Smoke and Mirrors* was my decision to use a chorus. I originally chose the chorus to give a unified voice to the people of the Manawatu. I felt that they were far more important to the play than merely as bystanders, and I wanted them to tell their own story of Joe and the effect he had on their lives. However, I soon realised that the chorus is greater than this. The chorus stands inside and outside of the play and its members represent in microcosm the whole of human society - with all of its anxieties and aspirations, all of its meanness and humanity. They stand for the universal ‘us’ and we respond to them. In addition, the chorus speaks a language of poetry and symbol, and this poetic language has lifted and universalised the play in ways I had not initially foreseen. Euripides, Sophocles, Aeschylus and other classical Greek dramatists all made use of a chorus to raise their plays from the quotidian to the universal. It may be fanciful to suggest this, but perhaps when we watch a contemporary play written with a chorus we have echoes of those profound tragedies still sounding in our subconscious minds. I know they sound in mine.

A further factor in universalising the play happened largely by chance. I knew that Joseph Pawelka had disappeared from New Zealand probably in early 1912 and I wanted to express this disappearance symbolically. Because I already knew that Houdini had flown his plane in Australia at around this period I imagined Houdini crossing the Tasman Sea and arriving from the air to whisk Joe away from his earthly problems into an ‘otherworld’ in the sky. Thus the flawed and mortal man Joseph Pawelka is raised up and enters the realm of the gods. This

final apotheosis of Joe is the last we see of him and gives to the play a larger more cosmic dimension. It also serves to emphasise the mythical figure he will ultimately become.

Relevance

If '*Smoke and Mirrors*' is at least to some degree 'universal' then it should also have relevance and meaning for a contemporary audience. Is this truly so? Did the audiences of 2012 'get' the play or were they baffled by it? And what is 'meaning' anyway. The word is slippery and subjective, and the more I puzzle over it the more difficult it becomes. In the end I go back to my own experience of sitting at each performance and watching the different audiences respond to what they are seeing. There is a particular quality of stillness that an audience has when it is attending closely to the action on stage - a kind of willing and focused concentration. All of the audiences show this engagement. Nobody coughs, and nobody whispers or shuffles. Afterwards, at the end of each performance I speak to as many theatre-goers as I can to assess their reactions to the play. Even allowing for politeness, and a reluctance to offend the playwright (!), almost everyone I speak to seems to understand that the play is more than just a portrayal of historical events, and that issues raised in it of ostracism, alienation, poverty and scapegoating are with us today, and can still tear communities apart. Sometimes, viewing issues such as these obliquely, through an historical lens, can serve to highlight aspects of our current social dilemmas, and to help us comprehend them more clearly. In addition, the 'Man Alone' aspects of Joe's story are instantly recognised by the audience. New Zealand has had many other well-known prisoners on the run over the past hundred years and even today a persistent gaol-breaker is styled a 'Man Alone' (or sometimes even a 'Houdini') by the media.

Rooted as it is in history and regional memory, *Smoke and Mirrors* is most especially relevant to the community it is drawn from – the people of the Manawatu. Hence, while the play is universal in its application, it also foregrounds the importance of the small and local, as it celebrates one of the Manawatu's own unique stories. Local stories matter in a community. They give a sense of belonging and of place. Audiences obviously enjoyed and responded to hearing familiar names on stage, especially as this does not happen very often. Regional references such as 'Kimbolton' 'Ashhurst' 'Palmerston North' and 'the Manawatu River' all grounded and particularised the action on stage and made a real connection with the Manawatu folk who had come to see it. Even in the choral sections of the play the references are often specifically local - 'the abattoir at Awapuni', for example. *Smoke and Mirrors* has

brought Joseph Pawelka's experience once more into the light, but this time crafted into a new work of theatre. As they watched the play unfold, audiences from around the region would have been reminded that stories from their own community are valuable, and that they deserve to be remembered. When I began on this project I did not set out to write a community play, but I see now that in some respects I have done so. The play is a dramatized local story, and was performed by a large cast of local people, and acted out in front of a local audience. The multiplicity of familiar names and locations in the play, combined with its non-naturalistic style, gives *Smoke and Mirrors* a special depth and intensity when it is performed here, in or near the Palmerston North streets where the drama of Joseph Pawelka was originally played out.

On a larger New Zealand wide scale, in a combination of fact and fantasy *Smoke and Mirrors* tells the human story of an increasingly disturbed and alienated young man and an anxious young woman struggling for something better amid the wreckage of their marriage. The play also reveals the complexity of the response to Joseph Pawelka. Initially his transgressions are relatively minor – petty thieving, and stealing household furniture - but the 'ante' is constantly being 'upped' between Joe and his Manawatu community. From his first offence Joe's actions and the community's response to them become increasingly heightened until he is eventually tried for arson and murder. It is a sadly familiar tale, Joe the villain, Joe the gaol-bird can be found in any country - he is any resentful and self-obsessed young man whose crimes have spiralled out of control. In a more vengeful community than New Zealand he could well have been hanged for them. All of these issues depicted theatrically and symbolically in *Smoke and Mirrors* are understandable and relevant to present day New Zealanders. That Joe finally manages to escape and disappear at the end of the play seems to offer some hope for a better life elsewhere, for him and even for us, and serves to end the play on an upward trajectory.

Conclusion

Over all, in a final answer to my thesis question, my experience with writing *Smoke and Mirrors* and seeing it performed has shown me that it is possible to write a play about a legendary local figure that will universalise his story and will connect and resonate with audiences today. Good stories never go out of fashion, and quintessentially human conflicts of love, rejection and revenge will always have the capacity to stir us. Nevertheless an historical play built around a real person such as Joseph Pawelka requires not only a considerable amount of research beforehand, but also the ability of the playwright to then put aside all those facts so painstakingly gathered and to use this material as a kind of springboard into a new work of literature while still keeping to the emotional ‘truths’ of the original story. I have done this to some extent with *Smoke and Mirrors* but I see now that I could have done more.

Of course, what is even more crucial than the subject matter to the effectiveness of any play will always be the quality of the writing. All plays, whether historical or not, generally benefit from some judicious cutting by the playwright, and *Smoke and Mirrors* is no exception. I will cut six or seven minutes out of any future production. This is a niggling thought however, and not related to my conclusion, except that for an historical play of this kind to succeed with an audience it cannot merely rely on being about a well-known character from the past who happens to be ‘local’. It must also be a lively, crisp, engaging and well-written piece of theatre, with enough intellectual and emotional ‘meat’ in it to keep audiences thinking and involved. *Smoke and Mirrors* isn’t quite there yet, but it will be.

Incidentally, the past sometimes comes full circle. When Joseph Pawelka was captured by the police after his first escape from gaol he was wearing an overcoat stolen from a man named ‘Anderson’, a workmate at the Palmerston North city abattoir.⁶⁷ Ivan Anderson, a younger member of the same family, was my father’s best friend at West End School.

Notes

1. In 1911 the population of Palmerston North is recorded by the Palmerston North City Council as 10,991 (excluding Maori). Palmerston North City Council, *Our City, An Introduction to Palmerston North*, www/pncc.govt.nz.
2. Michael King, *The Penguin History of New Zealand*, Auckland: Penguin Books, 2003. **280**.
3. Edward Shirley, *Children of the Empire*, New Zealand School Journal, Part 1, May 1910.
4. For a discussion of this 'double patriotism' see Michael King, *Penguin History*, **281**.
5. Michael King, **308**.
6. Michael Jackson, *The Blind Impress*, Palmerston North: The Dunmore Press, 1997. **21**.
7. Jackson, *The Blind Impress*, **20**.
8. John Mulgan, *Man Alone*, London: Selwyn and Blount, 1939, Auckland: Penguin Group (NZ), 2010, **157**.
9. The chronology of the *Lulu* plays is complex. Wedekind completed the first full version in 1894, and in 1898 (largely for reasons of censorship) the first three acts of this play plus one new one were produced under the title *Earth Spirit*, with Wedekind playing the role of Schöning (Schön). In 1904 the last two acts of the original *Lulu* play plus one new act were produced under the title *Pandora's Box*. Thus the play now became two plays and was better known in this form for many years. For an account of this chronology see the introduction to *Frank Wedekind's The First Lulu*, transl. Eric Bentley. New York: Applause Books, 1993. More recent play texts and stage productions have recombined the two plays and made cuts in some of the exposition to make them fit into a reasonable time frame.

For the purposes of this essay I have studied two of these different and more recent adaptations and translations. Firstly, Steve Gooch's version of the *Lulu* plays, where *Earth Spirit* becomes Act 1 and *Pandora's Box* Act 2 of the combined two hour play. This adaptation was commissioned by Red Shift Theatre and received its premiere at the Edinburgh Festival in 1990. See Frank Wedekind, *The Lulu Plays: The Marquis of Keith*, adapt. and trans. Steve Gooch, England: Absolute Press, 1990.

Secondly, Peter Barnes' adaptation and Charlotte Beck's translation of the combined plays (first presented at Nottingham Playhouse in 1970) - Frank Wedekind, *Lulu*, transl. Charlotte Beck, adapt. Peter Barnes, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971. *Lines and page references in the main text are to this version of the play.

10. See Peter Skrine, *Hauptmann, Wedekind and Schnitzler*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd, 1989. **96**.
11. Frank Wedekind, *Lulu*, adapt. Peter Barnes, transl. Charlotte Beck, London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1971. Act 1 Scene 2. **13**.
12. *Lulu*, Prologue, **1**.
13. *Pandora's Box*. Dir. George Pabst. Perf. Louise Brooks, Nero-Film, 1929. Restored edition. Second Sight, 2002.
14. Oscar Wilde, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, 1890-91, London: Penguin, 1994. In the novel the image in the portrait of Dorian ages and becomes increasingly more debauched, while Dorian himself remains young and beautiful until the calamitous end to the story.
15. *Lulu*, Act 1, Scene 2, **13**.
16. *Lulu*, Act 1, Scene 4, **33**.

17. *Lulu*, Act 1, Scene 2, **13**.
18. Bertolt Brecht,(with collaborator Elizabeth Hauptmann), *The Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Music, Kurt Weill, sets Casper Neher. Premiered Leipzig, March 1930.
19. See John Fuegi, *Bertolt Brecht: Chaos According to Plan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987. **47-49** for a wider discussion of Brecht's search for something that would 'enable him to bring the complex modern world into the theatre in an aesthetically, politically and economically viable form.'
20. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Collected Plays, Vol.2, Part 3, ed. John Willett and Ralph Manheim, transl. W.H.Auden and Chester Kallman . London: Eyre Methuen, 1979. * Line and page references in my text are to this version of the opera.
21. Kurt Weill and Bertolt Brecht, *Rise and Fall of the City of Mahagonny*, Los Angeles Opera, cond. James Conlan, perf. Anthony Dean Griffen, Audra McDonald, recorded live at Los Angeles Opera, March 2007. DVD.
22. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 13, **34**.
23. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 4, **8**.
24. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 12, **32**.
25. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 2, **5**.
26. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 20, **64**.
27. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 12, **31**.
28. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 13, **33**.
29. Brecht , *Mahagonny*, Scene 19, **62**.
30. Brecht, *Mahagonny*, Scene 19, **62**.
31. Mervyn Thompson, *Children of the Poor*, Christchurch: Hazard Press, 1990. * Line and page references in my text refer to this play.
32. John A. Lee, *Children of the Poor*, London: T. Werner Laurie, 1934. London: May Fair Books, 1963.
33. Thompson, *Children of the Poor*, see **9**.
34. See *Children of the Poor*, **9-10**. Thompson suggests here that David Edgar's adaptation for the theatre of Charles Dickens' novel *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby*, was first 'above all' of the various other influences on his work. This two-part Royal Shakespeare Company production was premiered at the Aldwych Theatre in London on 5 June 1980.
35. John A. Lee, *The Hunted*, London: T. Werner Laurie, 1936. Wellington: Price Milburn, 1975.
36. Isabella Lee, *The Not So Poor*, ed. Annabel Cooper, Auckland: Auckland University Press, 1992.
37. Thompson, *Children of the Poor*, **8**.
38. *Children of the Poor* was first performed Christchurch New Zealand, June 14, 1989.
39. Thompson, *Children of the Poor*, Act 1, **40-41**.

40. Thompson, Act 2, **59**.
41. Thompson, Act 2, **60**.
42. Thompson, Act 2, **77**.
43. Thompson, Act 2, **77**.
44. Thompson, Act 1, **50**.
45. Thompson, Act 2, **84**.
46. Thompson, Act 2, **85**.
47. Thompson, Act 2, **78**.
48. Thompson, Act 2, **62**.
49. Thompson, Act 1, **36**.
50. Thompson, Act 2, **59**.
51. Thompson, Act 2, **65**.
52. Thompson, Act 1, **41**.
53. Michael Jackson, *The Blind Impress*, **89**.
54. For a fuller discussion of Wedekind's fascination with the circus see Robert A. Jones. 'Frank Wedekind: Circus Fan'. *Monatshefte* Vol.61, No.2. University of Wisconsin Press. 1969. **139-156**
55. Marriott Edgar, (1880-1951). *Albert and the Lion*, Reprinted in www.poemhunter.com. Comic monologue made popular by Stanley Holloway (Also known as *The Lion and Albert*).
56. For details of Houdini's flights in Australia see *The Australasian* newspaper, March 19, *Melbourne*, 1910. Also www.uelectric.com/houdini.
57. Harry Houdini was born as Erik Weisz in Budapest Hungary. He later spelled his birth name the more German sounding Erich Weiss. His father was a rabbi, and he was one of seven children. The family was not well-off and throughout his childhood Houdini took several jobs. He made his public debut as a nine year old trapeze artist.
58. Houdini adored his mother Cecelia, and was grief stricken when she died. Similarly, Joseph Pawelka's one surviving letter to his mother Louisa shows real affection and concern.
59. 'A Terrible Denouement Sergeant McGuire Shot'. *Manawatu Daily Times*, 11Apr, 1910: **5**.
60. 'Another Terrible Tragedy Searcher Shoots Searcher The Death of Michael Quirke'. *Manawatu Daily Times*, 12 Apr, 1910: **5**.
61. 'Powelka (sic) and the Press. As Others See Us' 'Wairarapa Daily Times – The pursuers have more to fear from the pursued, and unless immediate steps are taken to convert the confused rabble of armed pursuers into an orderly band of searchers ... further tragedies may be expected.' Taihape's Opinion – Of Powelka (sic) or rather "polka" stories as they are now called, there is no end. In one town it was stated that he had killed eight policemen, and the canard was believed. In Taihape it is generally thought that he neither killed nor injured anyone...Palmerstonians seem to have lost their wits over the matter ... If something is not done to put a stop to the excitement it is possible that grievous harm will result.' *Manawatu Daily Times*, 16 Apr. 1910: **7**.

62. 'Pawelka's Penalty' '... Yesterday's "New Zealand Times" teems with letters of indignant protest against the callousness of the (Paweka's) sentence, and the hope is freely expressed that the whole Dominion will rise in its wrath and demand that Justice ... will be done to this much-wronged individual.' *Wanganui Chronicle*, 11 Jun. 1910: 5.
63. The full text of Pawelka's letter, is quoted in Jackson, *Blind Impress*, 66. The note, written on a grubby scrap of paper, was produced at Pawelka's trial where the handwriting and text were both authenticated.
64. Jackson, *Blind Impress*, 171.
65. The description comes from a 'Wanted' poster circulated throughout New Zealand after Pawelka's first escape from the lock up at Lambton Quay, on 23 March 1910. A reward of one hundred pounds was offered. Pawelka is described as having 'a thin face' and 'sunken cheeks'. Police Department file 1910. National Archives.
66. 'Ruahine Run', words and music anon. Neil Colquhoun, ed. *Songs of a Young Country*, Auckland: Steele Roberts, 2010. 65.
67. See Jackson, *Blind Impress*, 48.

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Smoke and Mirrors

(Original version)

A play by Carol Markwell



Historical Background to *Smoke and Mirrors*

Joseph (Joe) Pawelka was born on the 4th of August 1887, the eldest son of Moravian born parents. He attended school in Kimbolton but left when he was 13 to be apprenticed to a butcher. For the next few years, apart from a spell of severe illness, he seems to have worked in the butchery trade around the Manawatu and in Dannevirke.

In September 1909, when he was 22, Joe married Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Wilson, from Ashhurst. The marriage was unsettled and short-lived. After only a few months, Lizzie sought and was granted a separation order and Joe was later arrested and charged with theft after several stolen items were found in the couple's rented home in Church Street. Joe was confined to the police cells in Palmerston North, but escaped, was recaptured and sent to the Terrace Gaol in Wellington and escaped again.

His return to Palmerston North was marked with a trail of hold-ups and burglaries, and sparked a widespread manhunt with a reward of one hundred pounds offered for his capture. Military volunteers and armed civilians joined the police in the search for Joseph Pawelka and also patrolled the streets of Palmerston North. In the alarm and hysteria of the manhunt, two of the searchers were shot dead, and three major fires destroyed buildings in Palmerston North.

After several weeks of living rough in winter weather, Joe was eventually recaptured in a farmer's shed in Ashhurst. He was tried, pronounced an habitual criminal and sentenced to 21 years in gaol.

At this point, strangely, the mood of the public changed. From living in panic and fear of Joe Pawelka, many citizens now claimed they had helped him while he was on the run, and others protested at the severity of his sentence – even drawing up a large petition asking that the sentence be reduced.

Joe for some months behaved as a model prisoner, but he had retained an uncanny ability to get himself out of gaol. In early August 1911 he made the first of several new escape attempts, but was once more recaptured. He finally escaped for good on 27 August 1911. He never came to public notice again. His ultimate fate is unknown.

Smoke and Mirrors, although not a ‘realistic’ play, follows the trajectory of this story. A large portion of the play is set inside the mind of Joe Pawelka as he sits in gaol remembering some of the events that have led to his present situation.

Joe’s story is closely bound to the experience of the rest of his community. Indeed, the ordinary people of the Manawatu play a large part in *Smoke and Mirrors* as they did in Joe’s own life. They feature in the play as individual men, women and children, and also act together as a constant chorus, commenting on the impact of this darkly frightening, but sometimes exciting outlaw as he moves among them, challenging the orderliness of their lives.



Joe

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

SMOKE AND MIRRORS IS A DREAM PLAY SET LARGELY IN THE MIND OF THE MANAWATU OUTLAW JOSEPH (JOE) PAWELKA.

THE SIDES AND BACK OF THE STAGE ARE DRAPED WITH BLACK VELVET AND FLANKED WITH A VARIETY OF LARGE MIRRORS, AS IN A VAUDEVILLE SHOW. JOE'S CELL IS CENTRE STAGE. ITS WALLS ARE SUGGESTED RATHER THAN REAL SO THAT HE IS FREE TO MOVE OUTSIDE WHEN THE ACTION OF THE PLAY REQUIRES IT.

THE CAST NEVER LEAVE THE STAGE AND FUNCTION TOGETHER AS A KIND OF CHORUS OR ENSEMBLE, SINGING, CHANTING, CALLING OUT OR PERFORMING FRAGMENTS OF MUSIC HALL ROUTINES WHEN NOT PLAYING INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.

ALL ACTORS PLAY MULTIPLE ROLES. WHEN NOT ACTING OR 'PERFORMING' CAST MEMBERS STAND STILL, BUT REMAIN CASUALLY GROUPED AND OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT, AT THE REAR AND SIDE EDGES OF THE STAGE.

THE CAST ARE DRESSED IN THE CLOTHES OF ORDINARY MANAWATU TOWN AND COUNTRY FOLK OF THE PERIOD (1910-11) BUT THEIR FACES ARE SOMEWHAT GARISHLY MADE-UP TO RESEMBLE THOSE OF VAUDEVILLE PERFORMERS.

Cast

Joseph (Joe) Pawelka	24 years	Convicted Manawatu thief, arsonist and outlaw.
Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Wilson	30 years	Joe's ex-wife.
Mother & Father		Joe's parents, living in Kimbolton.
Agnes		Joe's younger sister
Jack		Joe's younger brother
Mrs Wilson		Lizzie's mother.
Lawyer		Palmerston North Courthouse
Judge		Palmerston North Courthouse
Cell mates		Palmerston North police cells and Wellington's Terrace Gaol
Harry Houdini		The American escapologist and showman.
Leonard Hampton		A Palmerston North butcher.
Boys 1&2, Girls 1,2&3		Children at Kimbolton Schoolyard
Child 1 & 2 and Dad		Members of a Manawatu family
Men and Women from the Manawatu community		

ACT ONE PROLOGUE

SILENCE AND DARKNESS ON STAGE, THEN THE SHARP CRACK OF A SINGLE PISTOL SHOT. LIGHTS UP, (BUT SHOWING ONLY DIMLY.)

SMOKE (DRY ICE) DRIFTS ACROSS THE STAGE OBSCURING EVERYTHING FROM VIEW. SLOWLY, OUT THROUGH THIS SMOKE COME THE CHORUS IN A LINE ACROSS THE STAGE. THEY STAND AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE. AS THE CHORUS SPEAK, LIGHTS BEGIN TO PAN VERY SLOWLY UP ON JOE, WHO IS IN THE POLICE CELLS BEHIND THEM. (NB THIS SECTION IS SPOKEN IN CHORIC VERSE)

CHORUS

VOICE 1 He was a gift.

ALL Find him, catch him!

VOICE 2 He came to us
 out of the ice and the rain
 and the unforgiving Spring.

ALL We are ordinary people
 of the Manawatu
 Raumai, Feilding,
 Palmerston North
 Ashhurst

We sweep our floors
We plant potatoes
We talk on street corners
We eat too much
We go to choir practice
Sometimes we get drunk..

He came into our world
out of the drenched paddocks
out of the freezing nights
out of the abattoir at Awapuni

He came out of rejection
He came out of the Manawatu River
He came into our houses
where we hunched in front of our fires

Just for a while
he stood beside us.

He was darkness
and we longed for him.

BUTCHER I am a butcher, I wanted to make him work.

PRIEST I am a priest, I wanted to reform him.

TEACHER I am a school teacher. I wanted to educate him.

ALL He came into our world
with his guns and his silence
He carried nothing in a sack on his back,
and he robbed us, even of that.

We needed him for the lies we told
We needed him for the pregnant girl
The shadow in the doorway, the gossip
flowing through the ear and out of the mouth.
We needed him for the crooked deal,
the bill unpaid, the tears in the kitchen,
the lunatic in the main street.

We needed him for the bleakness of the days,
The bent back in the milking shed,
the yellow soap in the washhouse,
the mud on our boots,
the tangled hair in the morning,
the mutton fat on our plate
the cow straining in the paddock
the hungry child in the town.

He was a gift. We needed him.

And when we lost him (PAUSE)
we had to invent him.

CHORUS MOVE BACK SILENTLY OUT OF THE LIGHT. IN THE
CLEARED SPACE WE SEE JOE'S CELL, CENTRE STAGE.

1

POLICE CELLS

LIGHTS UP. IT IS MARCH 1910. JOE IS IN CUSTODY FOR THE
FIRST TIME, IN THE POLICE CELLS AT PALMERSTON NORTH.
THE CELLS ARE CRAMPED, DARK AND UNSANITARY. JOE
AND HIS CELL MATE ARE ARGUING.

JOE What would you know.

CELL MATE All I'm saying is, you need to keep your head down. Don't get so shirty
with them.

JOE Buzzer that. It's like the Black Hole of Calcutta in here. It's nineteen bloody ten. I'll be an old man before I see the light of day. I've got to get out.

CELL MATE You just lie low, mate. Remember what you're in here for. All that stuff you pinched. Somebody has to pay for it.

CAST (CALL OUT IN TURN FROM THE DARKNESS)
Burglary of Harold Cooper's house.
Theft of a bicycle from Ira Gordon.
Theft of a clock.
Theft of crockery, silver, hearth rugs and kettles.
What about my 350 cigars!
A set of silver hair brushes.
Breaking and entering the house of Mrs McKay
Burning down the house of Mrs McKay.
(LOUDER) Remanded in custody!

CELL MATE Christ! I'm just a D.I.C. Ha Ha. Woke up in here with a king-sized headache. Too much to drink before closing time. Did you really do all that?

JOE (OFF-HAND) Nah ... A cobbler sold them to me. But I never kept anything to prove it. Stupid.

CELL MATE Some cobbler. SILENCE, THEN

JOE I was nowhere near the old girl's house when it went up. I was miles away, at Stoney Creek, shooting rabbits.

CELLMATE Yeah?

JOE I'm a crack shot. I can hit anything, once I get my eye in. Only, they took away my pistol when they shoved me into this dump.

CELL MATE (INTERESTED, AND SOMEWHAT IMPRESSED) Go on! Well I'll tell you something Joe, and I'll tell you it for free. I been in this lock-up before. If you really want to get out soon, just keep a looky out. The coppers aren't always that smart at locking up the front door.

JOE (SHORTLY) Thanks. I gotta get home for a bit.

CELL MATE Where's that?

JOE Kimbolton. (LIGHTS DOWN ON JOE'S CELL)

2 **KIMBOLTON SCHOOLYARD** THE CAST HAVE BECOME CHILDREN. JOE AND SOME OF HIS PRIMER CLASSMATES

ARE SITTING TOGETHER HAVING LUNCH. ONE BOY HAS A BAG OF MARBLES.

GIRL 1 You boys are being mean to us. Come on, you gotta let us play.

BOY 1 I say you can't.

GIRL 2 Why not?

BOY 1 ' Cos I'm the boss of this game...

GIRL 1 You are not!

BOY 1 ' Cos my father's a farmer. He rides round all day on a big black horse called Darkie. He can lift a fifty pound bag of spuds. And put it on his back.

JOE My father's stronger than your father.

BOY 1 Is not.

JOE Is so.

GIRL 1 He is not!

JOE It's true. It's true. He can lift a hunderd pound sack. On his own. 'CHILDREN' ALL LOOK AT JOE. HE KNOWS HE HAS THE FLOOR.

GIRL 2 (BEGINS) My father... (SHE IS INTERRUPTED BY JOE)

JOE Where we used to come from ... one day a big lion got loosed and it ran down the street and everyone was scared and my father caught it and whacked it on the bum. Like this (MIMES). An then he rode it, round and round, till it got too tired, an then he came home.
JOE IS WARMING TO HIS THEME
He's brave too. He can fight bears all on his own without nobody else ..

OLD FASHIONED SCHOOL BELL RINGS. JOE STAYS ON THE SCHOOL BENCH. HE WATCHES THE NEXT SEQUENCE, FASCINATED, WHILE OTHER CHILDREN RUN BACK INTO THE SHADOWS.

MUSIC HALL/VAUDEVILLE SEQUENCE: THESE SEQUENCES ARE PERFORMED DIRECTLY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE. PERFORMER 1, IS HALF WAY THROUGH HIS MONOLOGUE. PERFORMERS 2 -6 JUGGLE; POSE AS STRONG MEN OR WOMEN, OR CREATE A LIVING TABLEAU, USING THEIR BODIES.

PERFORMER 1 (LARGE. MUSIC HALL STYLE)
...There were one great big Lion called Wallace;
His nose were all covered with scars –
He lay in a somnolent posture,
With the side of his face on the bars.

So straightway the brave little feller,
Not showing a morsel of fear,
Took his stick with its 'orse's 'ead 'andle
And pushed it in Wallace's ear.

You could see that the Lion didn't like it,
For giving a kind of a roll,
He pulled Albert inside the cage with 'im
And swallowed the little lad 'ole .

The manager wanted no trouble,
He (SLOWER AND FADING TO VERY SOFT) took out his purse
right away ...

LIGHTS DOWN ON MUSIC HALL. YOUNG JOE ARRIVES
HOME IN KIMBOLTON. MOTHER IS KNITTING.

JOE (EXCITEDLY) Mum! Mum! I found a sixpence. On the road outside
Hansens. Look! (OPENS HIS HAND AND SHOWS MOTHER) I'm
giving it you Mum.

MOTHER Joe, you're a good boy to do that for your mother. (SIGHS)
Now your father's out of work again we don't have anything to come
and go on. (SIGHS AGAIN AND BRUSHES THE HAIR OUT OF
HER EYES) What would I do without you. (PUTS AN ARM
AROUND JOE'S SHOULDER AND HUGS HIM)

JOE Mum, I got top in sums today. The headmaster gave me a big tick on
my work and all the other kids clapped. Teacher says I'm her best
pupil.

MOTHER (KNITTING AGAIN) It's very good that you're working so well at
school. (SHE SMILES APPROVINGLY AT JOE).

JOE (EXCITED) When I grow up I'm going to get lots of money. And I'm
going to wear flash clothes, an have a gold ring, an shoot all the robbers
with my gun. I'm going to be a policeman. I'm going to travel with my
circus act. All over the world. I'm going to do magic. I'm going to be
famous...

MOTHER (ABSENTLY – SHE IS LOOKING AT HER KNITTING) Remember,
God sees you whatever you do.

JOE See my card trick. Agnes! Ja-ack! JOE'S SISTER AND BROTHER
JOIN HIM. MOTHER LOOKS ON. JOE PICKS UP A PACK OF

CARDS AND SHUFFLES IT RATHER CLUMSILY.

JOE (HOLDS OUT THE PACK TO AGNES) Pick a card.

AGNES Why should I.

JOE Come on Agnes, any old card. (SHE PICKS ONE OUT AND LOOKS AT IT)

JOE Now, give it to me. (SHE DOES SO. JOE MAKES A SHOW OF INSERTING THE CARD INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK BUT SECRETLY TUCKS IT IN AT THE BOTTOM. HE TURNS HIS BACK ON HIS SIBLINGS, PEEPS AT THE CARD, THEN MAKES A GREAT SHOW OF RESHUFFLING THE PACK.

JOE Do you want to know what your card was? (AGNES AND JACK NOD, EAGERLY) It was... (PRODUCES IT WITH SOME EFFORT AND THEN WITH A FLOURISH) It was the nine of diamonds!

JACK How did ya do that? Tell us Joe.

AGNES Why don't you tell us Joe.

JOE (SLYLY) I got ways. A magician never tells his secrets

MOTHER (SMILES FONDLY) You're a clever boy, Joe.

JOE STANDS IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM AND BEGINS DECLAIMING. THE OTHERS LOOK ON, ADMIRINGLY.

JOE There were one big Lion called Wallace,
His nose were all covered wiv scars
He lay in a som... som ...nent posture
Wiv the side of his face on the bars

You .. you could see that the Lion didn't like it,
For giving a kind of a roll,
He pulled Albert ... inside the cage wiv 'im
And swallowed the little lad 'ole.

And ... and ... (FADES AWAY)

3 POLICE CELL PALMERSTON NORTH
SEMI DARKNESS. JOE IS INSPECTING THE CELL 'DOOR'.

JOE (MUSING) ... And swallowed the little lad ... whole.

CELL MATE What was that?

JOE I'm getting out of here.

THERE ARE TWO METAL BUCKETS NEAR THE CELL DOOR. JOE STACKS ONE ON TOP OF THE OTHER AND USES BOTH TO 'CLIMB' OVER THE PRISON YARD WALL. TEMPORARILY FREED, HE SEIZES AN OLD BICYCLE FROM THE REAR OF THE STAGE AND RIDES ROUND AND ROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE STAGE, FASTER AND FASTER WITH THE REST OF THE CAST FOLLOWING HIM. (THIS EPISODE WILL HAVE A SURREALLY 'KEYSTONE COPS' ELEMENT.) EVENTUALLY JOE IS CAUGHT AND RESTRAINED.

POLICEMAN 1 Got him!

POLICEMAN 2 Come here you little ... Houdini. By Christ you won't play the same kind of trick again. We'll put you into the Terrace Gaol in Wellington. Then you'll find out what it's all about!

CELL THE TWO POLICEMEN FROGMARCH JOE BACK INTO HIS AND MIME LOCKING THE DOOR. JOE SLOUCHES ON HIS SEAT, GLUMLY.

CELL MATE Back again.

JOE (FLATLY). Yeah. Well I nearly had them though. I nearly had them. I'm buggered now. It was bloody cold out there.

CELL MATE You got a missus? Did you see her?

JOE Yeah, I mean no, I never saw her.

CELL MATE (CURIOUSLY) Young, aren't you to have a missus.

JOE Yeah. We got married last year. Here, in Palmerston.

LIGHTS CHANGE. LIZZIE APPEARS AND SITS DOWN BESIDE JOE BUT ONLY JOE CAN SEE HER. SHE IS STITCHING A BEDSPREAD. SHE SPREADS THE FABRIC OUT OVER HER LAP AND BENDS OVER IT. IT IS THE FIRST WEEK OF THEIR MARRIAGE.

JOE Giddy Lizzie. What're you doing there?

LIZZIE I'm stitching. It's going to be a bedspread. For us. See, (SHOWS HIM) it's got this star pattern in the middle. The blue goes nice with the grey. It's all in backstitch ...

JOE Good old Lizzie. Come on up town with me now. You can wait in the tearooms if you want to.

LIZZIE (STILL SEWING) I need to finish the bedspread. To keep us warm.

It's so cold in this house at night. We're going to freeze without it.

JOE Mm

LIZZIE Joe, I do wish you wouldn't call me that.

JOE What?

LIZZIE Old Lizzie. Mum doesn't like it. She says it sounds cheap.

JOE Y' don't have to listen to your Mum all the time. You're married to me now.

LIZZIE It's so strange all day when I'm here on my own. Noisy, you know. Not like Ashhurst.

JOE Silly old girl. I'll get my mate Archie to come round and bring us some firewood. (PAUSE) Now you come here and give us a kiss. (LIZZIE LEANS OVER AND KISSES JOE)

JOE And you can give us that too.

JOE REACHES FOR THE BEDSPREAD AND PULLS IT AWAY FROM LIZZIE. HE WRAPS IT AROUND HIMSELF WHILE LIZZIE DRIFTS AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS.

4 KIMBOLTON. MOTHER, YOUNG JOE, AND JACK AND AGNES ARE SITTING AROUND THE FIREPLACE. THEY HOLD THEIR HANDS OUT TO THE FIRE'S WARMTH.

AGNES Tell us one of your stories, Joe. You always tell such good stories. (ENTREATS) Ple-ease. Pretty please.

JACK LOOKS AT MOTHER WHO NODS.

JACK Come on, old Joe.

JOE BEGINS HIS STORY IN 'ONCE UPON A TIME' FAIRYTALE MODE.

There once was a boy, called... Joseph. And he was the strongest, and cleverest and bravest person in all of the world. ... The totara trees in the bush bent down their branches when he walked past them. Even the birds and animals used to do what he said. Everything did what he said. And this boy, this boy used to go off on adventures. He marched through the jungle, with only a monkey as a faithful servant and a guide. When bank robbers came along, he shot them with his six-gun. He made the town safe for his mother and his brother and his sister Agnes. One day ...

AGNES (EAGERLY) Tell us about the girl, Joe. You haven't told us about the girl. That's the best bit.

JOE ... one day, he met a girl and she was the most beautiful girl in the whole wide world. She was so beautiful that birds sang in the trees for her. And Joseph said to the girl will you marry me and come and live with me in my house the woods? And the girl shook out her long brown hair and said, yes I will. And so they got married.

AGNES And she had a wedding dress made of white silk.

JOE And he had fine swanky clothes ... and he rode a big black horse called Darkie.

FATHER (ENTERS ABRUPTLY) Yes. And I'm the king of Spain. Sitting round telling stories. A great lump of a boy like you. Twelve years old. Why don't you get out and get yourself a job. Do something useful for a change. Earn your keep in this house.

JOE But I'm smart. I'm good at school, teacher says ...

FATHER Teacher says nothing! You can go for a butcher, like your Uncle John.

MOTHER AND FATHER DRIFT BACK INTO THE SHADOWS.

5

PRISON CELL WELLINGTON

JOE SITS SLUMPED AT THE TABLE IN HIS CELL.

CELL MATE Cheer up Joe. Your sister brought in some more books for you. Let's see...(LOOKS AT THE BOOK TITLES) You got *Pick* ... something

JOE (BECOMING MORE INTERESTED) *Pickwick Papers?*

CELLMATE Yeah, and *America at Work*. I wish I could read like you do. It would help, you know, pass the time.

JOE Once I got this book, by an American chap called Houdini. *Handcuff Secrets*. I read it till it fell to bits. God, I could've done with it in here. (LAUGHS BITTERLY) He's a clever bloke. Magician.

HOUDINI APPEARS, BUT ONLY JOE CAN SEE HIM.
IN THIS NEXT SECTION HOUDINI AND JOE SPEAK IN UNISON

HOUDINI I defy death. I'm a headline act in vaudeville.
JOE He defies death. He's a headline act in vaudeville.

JOE & HOUDINI

(TOGETHER)

I open locks with cunning and with concealed keys. I can get out of riveted boilers, mail bags, milk cans - nothing can hold me. I am a master of illusion. Once I made a full grown elephant and its trainer disappear. My most famous act is my escape from the Chinese Water Torture Cell. What more can I not accomplish! (FADES TO SOFT) And I love my old mother more than anything else in the world.

HOUDINI SWEEPS AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS, LEAVING JOE STARING AFTER HIM

CELL MATE

Y'know, you're not a bad bloke, Joe, but sometimes you talk very weird...

JOE

I want to be out of here now. I want to put the clock back. I want to start again.

LIGHTS DOWN. JOE IS STILL SITTING AT THE TABLE IN HIS CELL, BUT HE IS REMEMBERING ONE OF HIS EARLIEST JOBS AS A BUTCHER IN DANNEVIRKE. 'YOUNGER' JOE IS WRITING A LETTER TO HIS MOTHER. HE SPEAKS THE WORDS ALOUD AS HE WRITES.

JOE

My dear Mother, since I came here to Dannevirke I have got a job butchering in the town and I intend to stick to it if I don't have a row with the boss. Oh Mother, what about the photo you promised me I should like to have a separate one of the lot of you Agnes, Jack and yourself. (PAUSE)

I expect if I were to go back I should find nearly all strangers and all the young fellows married by what I have heard ... the fools are mad and don't know what they are doing never mind we all have to go through the mill once they find women out as I have they won't trouble their heads about them ...

THREE BUTCHERS APPEAR, IN STAINED BUTCHERS' APRONS AND HATS. ONE IS LEONARD HAMPTON, A PREVIOUS EMPLOYER, (MANAGER OF BANKS & CO., BUTCHERY IN THE SQUARE.)

THE BUTCHERS STAND AROUND JOE, ACCUSINGLY.

HAMPTON

You're sacked, Joe Pawelka. I'm not having you round here any more.

JOE

(HOTLY) I do my job don't I. I work hard in this shop.

HAMPTON

Y' don't talk to me like that, Pawelka! I can't trust you. You tell nothing but lies. All the time. And you can take that stupid smile off your face. I don't like the look of you and I don't like the sound of you. I've had enough. You can take your wages and go.

JOE

(MUTTERS UNDER HIS BREATH) Old bastard. (THEN) What am I going to tell Lizzie?

LIZZIE APPEARS FROM THE SHADOWS. ONLY JOE IS ABLE TO SEE AND RESPOND TO HER.

JOE I've come into a bit of money, Lizzie.. We'll go away somewhere. Have ourselves a holiday. You can have some flash new clothes. All the fellows say Napier's a grand place...

LIZZIE (SHAKES HIS ARM OFF) You make things up, Joe Pawelka. You live in a fantasy world.

JOE Old Hampton says I'm the best worker he ever had.

LIZZIE You liar! You don't even have a job any more. Mrs Hampton told Mum and she told me, which is more than you did. I don't want to see you till you find some more work and you start telling the truth to me.

JOE Y'know Lizzie, my friend Archie McCrae. The one from Shannon. He and me. We're going into the furniture business. We're started already. We're going to be big in the Manawatu. You won't see us for dust.

LIZZIE Big. What with? There's no money Joe. There never has been. I can't even pay the grocer. It's ... shaming. I can't take any more of this, Joe.

JOE Stay with me Lizzie. You have to.

LIZZIE You lie to me. All the time. I never know if you're ever telling me the truth. And I never know what you'll do next. You're not being fair to me Joe.

JOE (ENTREATING) We got on alright. We had some good times didn't we. Down at the hall. All the singing and that.

LIZZIE (BITTERLY) Precious few. (SHE TURNS AWAY FROM HIM)

AS LIZZIE SPEAKS THIS LINE THE REST OF THE CAST MOVE FORWARD. THEY LINK ARMS TOGETHER AS MUSIC HALL/VAUDEVILLE PERFORMERS, AND SWAY IN TIME TO THE MUSIC AS THEY SING

CAST (SING) *Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look sweet, upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two ...*

JOE (TO LIZZIE) You used to like a good singsong.

PERFORMER 2 STEPS FORWARD, HANDS CLASPED IN CLASSIC 'SINGER' POSE, AND BEGINS TO SING. AS SHE SINGS, JOE PUTS HIS ARM TENTATIVELY AROUND LIZZIE'S

WAIST. SHE IS RELUCTANT AT FIRST BUT DOES NOT MOVE AWAY FROM HIM.

PERFORMER 2
SINGS

*Just a song at twilight
When the lights are low
And the flick-ring shadows
Softly come and go.
Though the heart be weary
Sad the day and long
Still to us at twilight
Comes love's old song
Comes lo-o-ove's old song*

THE CAST MOVE BACK TO THEIR SEATS IN THE SHADOWS.
LIZZIE PULLS AWAY FROM JOE.

LIZZIE I'm not staying with you, Joe. You tell too many stories. Mum says ...

JOE (ANGRILY) What am I supposed to do?

LIZZIE I don't know and I don't care. You better move into a boarding house. There's plenty in town. Or go back to your people in Kimbolton.

LIZZIE MOVES AWAY AS MOTHER MOVES INTO THE LIGHT.
SHE CARRIES A SMALL MIRROR.

MOTHER Joe, did you break my best china cup with the blue roses.

JOE No, no, it wasn't me. I told you. I wasn't anywhere near it. I was out in the garden. Jack and Agnes did it when they were playing with it last Sunday.

MOTHER (SADLY) Jack and Agnes took the punishment for it, but it was you all the time, you who broke it.

JOE (HOTLY) I never did.

MOTHER Have a look in this mirror. (MOTHER HOLDS UP THE MIRROR AND JOE RELUCTANTLY LOOKS AT HIS REFLECTION)
That is the face that God sees. That is the face of a liar.
Always remember Joe, when you tell a lie to me, you are lying to God.

MOTHER DRIFTS OUT OF THE LIGHT, CALLING BACK

MOTHER You need to tell him that you are sorry for what you did.

JOE (ONCE SHE IS OUT OF EARSHOT) It was only a stupid cup.

CAST (CHANT TOGETHER SOFTLY) *Liar, liar, your pants are on fire
Liar, liar, your pants are on fire*

A BURST OF MUSIC. SIX BUTCHERS DANCE INTO THE LIGHT, ARMS LINKED. THEY MOVE TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND TELL THE FOLLOWING JOKES VERY RAPIDLY AND THEATRICALY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE

PERFORMER 1 I say I say I say. Are your relatives in business?

PERFORMER 2 Yes, in the iron and steel business.

PERFORMER 1 Oh, indeed.

PERFORMER 2 Yes, me mother irons and me father steals!

CAST (ALL) Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!

PERFORMER 3 Do you serve lobsters?

PERFORMER 4 I serve anybody, Sir.

PERFORMER 5 We 'ad two windmills on our farm, but we took one down.

PERFORMER 6 Why was that?

PERFORMER 5 There wasn't enough wind for two!

PERFORMER 1 I say I say I say. How can I get rid of some ugly fat?

PERFORMER 2 I don't know. How can you get rid of some ugly fat?

PERFORMER 1 Send her home to mother!

CAST (ALL) Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha! BUTCHERS LINK ARMS AND DANCE AWAY.

6

GAOL BREAK

JOE REMAINS SLUMPED IN HIS CELL IN THE HALF DARK.
LIZZIE REAPPEARS

JOE STRETCHES OUT HIS HANDS TO HER Lizzie, I want you.

LIZZIE ... When you touch me your hands smell like meat.

JOE HALF SHOUTING HALF SOBBING I work in a bloody abattoir.
What did you expect!

LIZZIE I hate you when you get like this!

JOE Do you think I like it.. working in that stinking place all day, with the guts and the smell and the blood round your feet. You made me take that abattoir job. It was what you wanted. You can't turn round now and complain!

LIZZIE You've got to go. Pick up your stuff ... and you can take that gun with you! The one you never told me about. (MEANINGFULLY) That I had to find. In the washhouse.

JOE (CRIES OUT) Lizzie! ... (HELPLESSLY) I'm warning you Lizzie ...

JOE SINKS HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS .

LIZZIE What else have you done that I don't know about? I'm not staying, Joe. I'm going back to Ashhurst. To be with Mum.

JOE What're you going to do then?

LIZZIE .If you were even half of a real man you'd look after me. You wouldn't keep losing all those jobs. Mum says ...

JOE (INTERRUPTS HER) I slog my guts out for you. What more do you want!

LIZZIE I'm pregnant, Joe. SHE STARTS TO WALK AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS. JOE STARES AFTER HER.

JOE Wait Lizzie! I did it for you. All that stuff for the house. I got it together so's you'd stay with me.

LIZZIE You stole it. Stole it. Stole it. All those chairs, all those pictures. That carpet, the lamp and the bed. You're no better than a common thief Joe Pawelka and I wish I'd known... (SHE WALKS AWAY OUT OF THE LIGHT)

JOE (WAILS) Curse you Lizzie! You should've stayed!

CELL MATE So what are you going to do now?

JOE SHAKES HIS HEAD HELPLESSLY, THEN STOOPS TO PICK SOMETHING UP FROM THE FLOOR. HE INSPECTS IT CLOSELY. IT IS A WOMAN'S HAIR PIN (THE OLD-FASHIONED KIND, WITH TWO PARALLEL METAL PRONGS).

JOE She left her bloody hairclip.

SLOWLY HE PRISES THE TWO ENDS APART UNTIL HE IS LEFT WITH ONE LONG THIN PIECE OF WIRE. HE HOLDS IT UP, THOUGHTFULLY.

A man could do something with this. A man could ...

DEFTLY, HE USES THE WIRE TO TWIST AND PROD AT THE 'LOCK' ON HIS CELL DOOR. IN A FEW SECONDS HE IS FREE. HE LOOKS AROUND CAUTIOUSLY THEN DISAPPEARS INTO THE SHADOWS AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

CELL MATE (LACONICALLY) See ya, mate.

IMMEDIATELY THE CRY GOES UP

CAST (IN TURN) Pawelka's out again! Escaped from the Terrace Gaol!

Pawelka's on the loose! Lock your doors!

Trail of robberies! Seen in Longburn! Back in the Manawatu!

Seen in Feilding!

Pawelka! Pawelka! etc.

CHOREOGRAPHED PANDEMONIUM ON STAGE AS ALL OF THE CAST, EXCEPT LIZZIE AND JOE, JOIN IN THE FEVERISH AND WIDESPREAD SEARCH FOR HIM. WHEN WE CATCH OCCASIONAL GLIMPSES OF JOE IN THE MELEE HE IS WEARING A HAT AND A LONG WINTER OVERCOAT. THE UPROAR BUILDS TO A CLIMAX AS TWO OF THE SEARCHERS FACE EACH OTHER CHALLENGINGLY IN THE HALF DARKNESS.

SEARCHER 1 (SHOUTS) I've got him! He's mine! (HE FIRES AT POINT BLANK RANGE)

SEARCHER 2 FALLS TO THE GROUND. TWO OTHER SEARCHERS CROUCH DOWN TO EXAMINE HIM.

SEARCHER 3 My God. You've shot the wrong man.

COMPLETE SILENCE. EVERYBODY ON STAGE WATCHES AS THE DEAD MAN IS DRAGGED SLOWLY OUT INTO THE DARKNESS. WHILE THIS IS HAPPENING, IMAGES OF A BURNING BUILDING BEGIN TO BE PROJECTED ON TO A SHEET OR SCREEN HUNG ON THE MIRROR AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE. *CHORUS BEGIN CHANTING AND CONTINUE AS THE FIRE ON THE SCREEN INCREASES IN INTENSITY. WE SEE JOE PAWELKA STANDING CENTRE STAGE WITH BOTH ARMS UPRaised. HE HAS HIS BACK TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE AND HIS FACE TO THE FLAMES.

*CHORUS

VOICE 1 What is that noise?

VOICE 2 Go inside now,
shut the door.

VOICES 3 & 4 Burning, burning.

ALL Look at it! See it!
Smoke licks its way into
every crevice of the night

 The fuel laid on the fire
The hot force of it
singeing, searing
My eyes burn.
The whip of flames
Palmerston North
our town lit up
and the brain, swarming
surging, burning

 The clanging bell
The fiery night, exploding
with heat and beauty (PAUSE)

 The ashes in the morning
the grey dust in the chimney

7 **ASHHURST**

LIGHTS UP STAGE LEFT. WE ARE AT LIZZIE'S MOTHER'S HOUSE IN A REMOTE PART OF ASHHURST. JOE STANDS CASUALLY WITH HIS BACK TO THE FIRE PLACE. HE HAS BROKEN INTO THE HOUSE. LIZZIE AND HER MOTHER, HANNAH WILSON, COME IN TO CHECK ON THE NOISE. MRS WILSON SCREAMS.

JOE Don't be afraid, Mother ... (MRS WILSON RUSHES OUT TO GET HELP)

JOE (URGENTLY) Lizzie, I have to talk to you.

LIZZIE You burnt down a school. You burnt down a furniture warehouse. You burnt down a men's clothing shop in the Square. Why did you do it Joe? Why?

JOE You've got my kid. That lump there in your belly. Lizzie, why won't you

stick with me! We can make it up. We can do better. Just give it a try for once. You're squeezing my heart.

JOE REACHES GENTLY FOR LIZZIE'S HAND

LIZZIE

RECOILS Get your hands off me! I despise you, Joe. I despise the stupid way you talk. I despise everything about you. You are never going to see me again. Now go!

SHE TURNS ON HER HEEL AND MOVES AWAY OUT OF THE LIGHT, AND JOE SLIDES OUT INTO THE SHADOWS. HE BEGINS ' WRITING ' THE LETTER HE WAS TO LEAVE IN AN EMPTY MILK BILLY IN ASHHURST, SAYING THE WORDS ALOUD AS HE WRITES.

JOE

To the manhunters of Ashhurst. (PAUSE) ... I might also state that a good many of the happenings of late that have been blamed on me are false. I also heard P. Hanlon say while within one yard of me that I shot at my wife this morning. That is also a foul lie, and he went near getting a bullet in his head for his pains. Excuse this writing for I have only a pointed bullet to scrawl with.

Signed, J. Pawelka, a man against the world.

FATHER

(CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) Go out and get a real job. A big lump of a boy like you.

LIZZIE

(CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) I despise you Joe. I despise everything about you.

MOTHER

(CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) Never, never quarrel with God.

JOE GATHERS HIS LONG COAT AROUND HIM. HE HAS BEEN ON THE RUN FOR SEVERAL DAYS NOW AND IT IS THE MIDDLE OF WINTER AND VERY COLD. HE HUDDLES DOWN IN AN ASHHURST COWSHED WITH A HALF EMPTY BOTTLE OF STOUT. HE IS WARY. HE HOLDS A STOLEN REVOLVER IN ONE HAND. FROM TIME TO TIME HE CHECKS HIS WATCH. GRADUALLY HE BEGINS TO SLUMP AND SLEEP.

8

CAPTURE

IT IS 6.30AM. TWO SEARCHERS HAVE SPOTTED PAWELKA SLEEPING. THEY WALK QUIETLY TOWARDS HIM BUT HE WAKES AND RAISES HIS GUN. SEARCHER 1 QUICKLY KNOCKS IT OUT OF HIS HAND AND DISARMS HIM. SEARCHERS 1 AND 2 HANDCUFF JOE AND MARCH HIM BETWEEN THEM.

JOE

Bloody cowards!

HE KICKS OUT AND STRUGGLES TO GET AWAY

JOE Do you think I'm a coward? (POINTS TO HIS HANDCUFFS) If so, take these off and I'll show you!

SEARCHER 1 It's all right Joe. You wouldn't shoot a man.

SEARCHER 2 No. Then who shot poor McGuire?

SEARCHER 1 Come on Joe. Turn out your pockets. What've you got in there?

JOE (DESPAIRING) This is hell on earth. Why didn't you put a bullet into me? Put one in now and they will think that I did it myself.

JOE TURNS OUT HIS POCKETS. HE HAS BEEN CARRYING DETONATORS AND SPARE AMMUNITION, STOLEN POSTAL NOTES, THE STOUT AND ANOTHER GUN.

SEARCHER 2 What's this in your top pocket. PULLS OUT A PHOTOGRAPH. Who's this?

JOE My wife Lizzie, and her mother. (PAUSE) I wanted to see my wife, and then I would have put a bullet into myself. She is an affectionate wife. My wife has lead me to this. My heart is broken. I can feel nothing.

SEARCHER 1 You haven't been very smart, Joe. You're going to be remanded in custody. Then you're going back to gaol for a long time and this time you won't get away.

JOE I'm going to be on trial for my life. Why don't you give me poison instead, to finish me off.

SEARCHER 2 The trouble you've caused us, that's not a bad idea, Pawelka.

9

PALMERSTON NORTH COURTHOUSE.

JOE STANDS IN THE DOCK. HIS HANDS ARE MANACLED. LAWYER AND JUDGE APPEAR AND STAND ON WOODEN BOXES, STAGE LEFT, SO THAT THEY SEEM TO TOWER OVER HIM. THEIR FACES ARE CHALK WHITE AND HEAVILY LINED WITH BLACK.

LAWYER John Joseph Thomas Pawelka, you have been charged with theft of a butcher's steel ...

IN THIS NEXT SEGMENT THE REMAINDER OF THE CAST SEATED AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE HAVE BECOME MEMBERS OF THE PALMERSTON NORTH PUBLIC CALLING OUT SOME OF JOE'S VARIOUS CRIMES. THIS IS DONE FAIRLY FAST SO THAT

LINES WILL OFTEN OVERLAP.

Burglary of Kendall's house in Foxton Line.
Breaking and entering Arthur Dixon's butchery.
Burning down the Boys' High School in Featherston Street.

LAWYER Escaping from lawful custody.

CAST (LOUDER NOW) Burning down Pegden's Warehouse
Burning Millar and Giorgi's in the Square
Burning the house of Helen McKay

JUDGE (PORTENTOUSLY) You are charged with the murder of Sergeant McGuire.

(THERE IS A GASP FROM THE CROWD THEN COMPLETE SILENCE)

JOE I didn't do it.

LAWYER Sir, in the McGuire shooting I must point out that the evidence is circumstantial. However (HOLDS UP A NOOSE OF THICK ROPE) like this rope, although no strand of evidence is strong enough to support the case on its own, each one contributes to the strength of the whole.

JOE (TOUCHES HIS NECK. SPEAKS MORE SOFTLY) I didn't do it.
(HE STANDS IN THE DOCK, READY FOR SENTENCING).

I am very sorry for the offences I have committed and for which I appear before the Court. I hope you will be as lenient as possible with me. I stole some of those things because I had to exist. I no more stole the furniture than you did, sir. (CAST LAUGHS)

JUDGE Then you should not have pleaded guilty.

JOE (FALTERING) I have had a very hard life, and have practically been on my own since I was thirteen years old. As for the charge of murder, I ...

JUDGE You were acquitted of that.

JOE I know, but people still say I'm guilty. I swear I was never near the place. I would sooner hang than be thought guilty.

JUDGE It is a painful thing to have to pass sentence on a man as young as you are for a series of very serious crimes. But I have to do my duty. You have pleaded guilty to twelve charges of breaking and entering and you have been found guilty of arson. You attempted suicide before your first arrest. I have to protect you against yourself and I have to do more. I have to protect the public against you. (SENTENTIIOUSLY) I declare that you are an habitual criminal and I pronounce a sentence of twenty-one years.

CAST (ECHO THE JUDGE'S WORDS, MENACINGLY)
Twenty-one years
Twenty-one years
Twenty-one years

JOE (SHAKES HIS HEAD IN DISBELIEF. HE SHOUTS) No!

LIGHTS DOWN ON COURT. JOE IS BACK IN HIS CELL, PACING UP AND DOWN.

JOE I never stole all that furniture.

LIZZIE (SOFTLY) Liar, liar.

BUTCHERS (JOIN IN) Liar, liar,

ENTIRE CAST Liar, liar, liar, **liar, liar, liar!**

JOE (SHOUTS, WILD-EYED) Stop it! For God's sake!

CELL MATE Shut up, Pawelka!

JOE (CONTINUES PACING) I will not stay in this fuckin' cell for the rest of my life. I will not do it.

CELL MATE You're clever, Joe. You're picking up boot-making real good. You're cleverer than I am. Look at all them books you read. You got your mother and your sister come and visit you in here often. That's more than my old lady does. There isn't one lag in here that doesn't wish you luck. You gotta think positive. You gotta think how to get by.

JOE (CALMER AND MORE THOUGHTFUL) Yeah. You do ...
HE PULLS OUT A PACK OF CARDS AND BEGINS TO SPREAD THEM OUT IN FRONT OF HIMSELF.

10 HOUDINI

LIGHTS CHANGE. HOUDINI ENTERS WITH BESS, HIS SHOWGIRL ASSISTANT. HE IS BARE-CHESTED. THERE ARE CHAINS AROUND HIS ARMS AND LEGS AND HEAVY HANDCUFFS AROUND HIS WRISTS. HE IS PERFORMING ONE OF HIS CELEBRATED 'ESCAPES'. JOE MOVES TO JOIN THE REST OF THE CAST AS PART OF HOUDINI'S 'AUDIENCE'.

HOUDINI (SHOWMAN STYLE) La-dies and gen-tle-men, I am Houdini, The King of Handcuffs, The Wizard of Shackles. There's nobody can beat me in the world. I've broken out of coffins, I've broken out of handcuffs,

I've broken out of lock-ups in forty states of the Union. My body is made of steel!

Good citizens of this town, just to show that my act is gen-u-ine I invite you to kindly step up close and have a look at these locks. Come on up ladies and gentlemen, come on up ...

SHOW MUSIC BEGINS. ONE OR TWO MEMBERS OF THE 'AUDIENCE' MOVE FORWARD TO CLOSELY EXAMINE THE PADLOCKS AND CHAINS. THE REST CHAT TO EACH OTHER, OR CRANE FORWARD EXCITEDLY TO WATCH THE SHOW. BESS PLACES A THREE-SIDED SCREEN OF CURTAINS AROUND HOUDINI. EXCITEMENT BUILDS AS THE MUSIC GETS GRADUALLY LOUDER, AND BEHIND THE CURTAIN SCREEN, HOUDINI WORKS TO FREE HIMSELF OF HIS RESTRAINTS. FINALLY HE STRIDES OUT IN FRONT OF THE CROWD, CHAINS AND HANDCUFFS IN HIS HANDS. TRIUMPHANTLY, HE HOLDS THEM UP. THE 'AUDIENCE' CLAPS AND CHEERS.

HECKLER (CAN BE EITHER A MEMBER OF THE 'AUDIENCE' ON STAGE OR PREFERABLY A MEMBER OF THE CAST WHO HAS MOVED QUIETLY TO SIT AMONG THE REAL THEATRE AUDIENCE). (CALLS OUT) That was a trick. A stupid trick. You're an impostor!

HOUDINI(MASTERFUL – HE THRIVES ON CHALLENGES LIKE THIS) I am no more an impostor than you are. A trick, was it. (PAUSE) I challenge you (LOOKS MEANINGFULLY AT HIS ACCUSER) or any one of you (LOOKS AT AUDIENCE) to come out here today and do what I have done. I'll stake you five hundred dollars if you can. Come on here. The cuffs are waiting.

SILENCE. THE 'AUDIENCE' WAITS BREATHLESSLY. THE HECKLER RELUCTANTLY SHAKES HIS HEAD.

HOUDINI Ha! La-dies and gen-tle-men, I am about to do something amazing. (CLAPS HIS HANDS AND A LARGE HEAVY RECTANGULAR BOX IS BROUGHT FORWARD FROM THE SIDE OF THE STAGE AND PLACED IN FRONT OF HIM) Do you see this box. (HE OPENS THE LID) Go on, have a look inside. It's a regular box. No secret panels. (HE AND BESS TILT THE BOX SO THAT THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE).

HOUDINI Now, tie me up real good. (BESS AND OTHERS IN THE AUDIENCE SNAP HANDCUFFS ON HOUDINI'S WRISTS AND TIE HIS ARMS AND LEGS WITH A HEAVY ROPE).

Today, before your very eyes I, Houdini, hog-tied and fettered, will escape from this locked and bolted box.

(HE SLITHERS SOMEWHAT AWKWARDLY INTO THE BOX. BESS SHUTS THE LID AND CLOSES A COUPLE OF HEAVY BOLTS. FINALLY A LARGE PADLOCK ON THE FRONT IS SNAPPED SHUT)

MUSIC BEGINS, SOFTLY AT FIRST. BESS PUTS UP THE THREE-SIDED CURTAIN SCREEN SO THAT THE BOX CAN NO LONGER BE SEEN. THE 'AUDIENCE' BEGIN TO 'OOH' AND 'AH' WITH ANTICIPATION.

MUSIC BUILDS TO A CLIMAX. WITH A FLOURISH, BESS REMOVES THE CURTAIN SCREEN TO SHOW HOUDINI, FREED AND SEATED ON TOP OF THE BOX. THE CHAINS AND ROPES ARE AT HIS FEET AND THE BOLTS AND LOCKS OF THE BOX ARE STILL CLEARLY INTACT.

HOUDINI BOWS AND WAVES TO THE CROWD, WHO CHEER HIM. HOUDINI PULLS A SHOWER OF BRIGHTLY COLOURED SILK SCARVES FROM HIS SLEEVE AND THROWS THEM TO THE 'AUDIENCE'. HE MOVES BACK INTO THE SHADOWS WITH BESS ON HIS ARM. THE REST OF THE CAST MOVE TOO, TAKING ALL OF HOUDINI'S PROPS WITH THEM. DARKNESS.

11

THE TERRACE GAOL, WELLINGTON

JOE AND CELL MATE ARE BACK IN THEIR CELL. MOTHER AND AGNES HAVE COME TO VISIT.

- MOTHER (GENTLY) Lizzie's had a little girl, Joe. A beautiful little daughter called Iris. Mrs Wilson sent a telegram to let us know.
- AGNES (EAGERLY) Oh Joe, she says the baby's perfect.
- JOE Lizzie ... a girl.
- MOTHER I'm sorry, Joe. She still won't see you. I asked, like you said, but she wants nothing more to do with you. She's going for a divorce.
- JOE What about the baby, Iris. She's my kid too. I have to see her! She's not playing fair with me.
- MOTHER (SIGHS) Nothing is fair in this world. You brought shame on all of us Joe, when you did what you did. Sooner or later somebody has to pay.
- JOE What do you think I'm doing here now, paying and paying.
- MOTHER Just give up any idea of seeing either of them, son. It's not going to happen.
- JOE (MUTTERS TO HIMSELF) We'll see about that.
- MOTHER You must get down on your knees and pray to God to make you a better person. Goodbye, Joe.

AGNES AND MOTHER LEAVE JOE AND RETURN TO THE SHADOWS

LIZZIE APPEARS. SHE MOVES TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND SPEAKS THE NEXT MONOLOGUE DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE.

LIZZIE

I did love him, you know... we were happy once. We had this little house in Church Street. (PAUSE) Sometimes I don't know why I do the things I do ...

I didn't want all this to happen. It was ... see, he had this chip on his shoulder ... And Mum was at me and at me till I never knew what to say... He'd done too much... (PAUSE)

I knew, once I had the baby, once I had Iris ... I couldn't let him see her. I didn't want her to ever know ...

He had this sort of ... darkness So, I had to break away. I had no choice. (MORE SOFTLY, AND TO HERSELF) I had no choice. I stayed in Ashhurst after I had the baby. Where else could I have gone ... but I never, I never stopped thinking about him ...

LIZZIE MOVES BACK OUT OF THE LIGHT AND WE SEE JOE, STILL IN HIS CELL.

ALL OF THE CAST EXCEPT JOE SING OR CHANT TOGETHER THE FOLLOWING MANAWATU CHILDREN'S SKIPPING RHYME. SOME MAY SKIP WITH ROPES AS THEY SING. WHILE THIS IS HAPPENING JOE MIMES SAWING AT THE BARS OF HIS CELL WITH A SMALL HACKSAW BLADE (THE TYPE HE WOULD HAVE HAD ACCESS TO IN THE PRISON BOOT SHOP.) HE SLIPS FREE OF THE CELL BUT IS SOON RECAPTURED BY TWO WARDERS FROM THE CAST, AND IS MARCHED INSIDE

CAST
SING

*Skip to me one and skip to me two,
Lizzie's mother is looking at you.
Skip to me three and skip to me four,
Who's that knocking at Wilson's door.
Skip to me five and skip to me six,
I love you I love you but push you away quick!
Skip to me seven and skip to me eight,
I'll push you and push you out of my gate.
It never will work, it was only a dream,
If my mother finds out she and I will scream!*

*Oh, skip to me one and skip to me two,
Lizzie's mother is ...*

SINGING FADES OUT AS JOE IS RETURNED TO HIS CELL

WARDER 1

It's the condemned cell for you now. You'll be watched every fifteen minutes. No more privileges. WARDER LEAVES. THE CELL IS IN

DARKNESS

JOE Bastards!

CELL MATE How many times is it this time Joe?

JOE Five. And I'm not giving up.

CELL MATE You're a wizard at escaping. There's no-one can touch you for it. Every man jack here will help you. You know that.

JOE Thanks. I'm just choosing my time.

A LIGHT IS BEING FLASHED INTO JOE'S CELL EVERY FEW MINUTES AS WARDERS CONTINUE TO CHECK ON HIM.

DRUM ROLL. LIGHTS CHANGE. HOUDINI ENTERS WITH A FLOURISH.

HOUDINI La-dies and gen-tle-men always remember. What the eyes see, and the ears hear, the mind believes. My next trick is impossible! In full view, I am about to release myself from the sort of straitjacket that is used on the murderous and insane. Put this heavy old jacket on me, and put it on real good.

BESS AND OTHERS FROM THE CAST STEP FORWARD AND STRAP AND BUCKLE HOUDINI INTO THE STRAITJACKET WITH HIS ARMS CROSSED IN FRONT OF HIM. HOUDINI STANDS CENTRE STAGE. THE REST OF THE CAST, ALL EXCEPT JOE, STAND AROUND HIM WATCHING.

HOUDINI Now. Look carefully ladies and gentlemen. They said it couldn't be done but Houdini will do it and every one of you will see it!

SECOND DRUM ROLL. INSIDE THE HEAVY CANVAS RESTRAINT HOUDINI BEGINS TO WRITHE AND STRAIN. IT TAKES A FIERCE EFFORT. HE MAY EVEN ROLL ALONG THE FLOOR. FINALLY HE HAS FREED HIS HANDS ENOUGH TO ALLOW HIM TO REMOVE THE BUCKLES AT THE FRONT, AND THEN AT THE BACK OF THE STRAIT-JACKET. HE REMOVES THE STRAITJACKET AND WAVES IT TO THE CROWD, WHO CHEER HIM. HOUDINI BOWS TO THE CROWD AND SWEEPS TO THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

JOE'S CELL IS AGAIN REVEALED. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE PLAY IT IS NOW FULLY LIT. THE CELL IS EMPTY. JOE HAS GONE FOR GOOD.

CHORUS STEP FORWARD AND SPEAK TO THE AUDIENCE (THIS SECTION IS SPOKEN IN CHORIC VERSE)

CHORUS Gone!

VOICE 1 Black gales come brawling out of the winter.

ALL We lost him

 We are ordinary people
 We understand the loneliness of the night
 The dead in the graveyard
 The broken fence-line
 The shut door
 The bankrupt account
 The starved cat in the gin trap

VOICE 2
(EXCITED) If I could tell it all..

 His crimes burned brightly
 We warmed our hands at them

ALL We do not ask for much
 We keep our clothes clean
 We give birth to children
 We read at the table
 We go to church

 We lead ordinary lives

 Yet, we look at the hills,
 range after range,
 and the implacable sun
 and those grey old stones
 in the river
 and we are afraid

 He came into our lives
 like a comet

 Who will we have now
 to carry our loads

VOICES 1&2 Find him! Catch him!

ALL What can we do ...
 How can we replace him
 Who will we have now
 to carry our loads.

12

AFTERMATH

JOE HAS ESCAPED FROM GAOL AND HAS DISAPPEARED. HE WILL NOT BE FOUND AGAIN

CAST NOW REPRESENT PEOPLE OF THE MANAWATU. THEY MILL AROUND THE STAGE AND SPEAK IN SMALL CLUSTERS. THE NEXT FEW EXCHANGES HAPPEN AMONGST THEM, AND ALL VERY RAPIDLY (THE SPEECHES ARE ALMOST OVERLAPPED)

DAD Joe Pawelka will come and get you. He'll break open the lock on the door and he'll put you in his big black sack and take you away. That's what he does to bad boys and girls.

CHILD 1 & 2 (DOUBTFULLY) No, Dad.

DAD He's out there in the hills. Maybe he can even hear what we say, so by cripes you kids better watch out!

A HUGE SHADOW OF A MAN IS THROWN ON TO THE SCREEN AT THE BACK OF THE STAGE. THE CROWD GASP. CHILD 1 & 2 WAIL LOUDLY.

MAN 1 I tell you I did see him. Running along the tops of the ranges, jumping over stumps and logs. He had that green slouch hat on and them yellow leggings he must've stolen from Millar and Giorgi's.

MAN 2 Go on. And where were you at the time?

MAN 1 Ashhurst. But I seen him just the same. He's got an awful mouth. A vile cruel mouth, as though he'd fire at you as quick as look at you. You know that type. A bad one... .

WOMAN 1 For a while there every blessed stranger at the door was Joe Pawelka.(LAUGHS)

WOMAN 2 If he came to my door I'd have let him in.

WOMAN 1 (QUIZZICALLY) Would you?

WOMAN 2 Where is he?

THE THREE WOMEN REMAIN TALKING TOGETHER BUT THEIR VOICES ARE NOW HUSHED SO THAT WE CAN NO LONGER TELL WHAT THEY ARE SAYING

CHORUS STEP FORWARD

ALL He was ours
And we lost him

VOICE 1 He was on a ship to America
VOICE 2 He had joined the army
VOICE 3 He was working in a woolstore in Taranaki
VOICE 4 He was fighting in the trenches in France
VOICE 1 He had drowned at sea
VOICE 4 He was holed-up in the Kaimanawas
VOICE 3 He was no man,
VOICE 1 He was nowhere
ALL He was everywhere.

He was lost
Nobody could find him
So, bit by bit
We made him up again

We made him out of words
Out of stories we told by the fire
Out of the darkness of Winter
Out of the bitterness of Spring

We made him out of our littleness
And we fed him
Until he was the person
We thought we wanted to be

VOICE 1 But he grew larger

ALL His was the face at the window
The terror in the night
The rifled bach in the bush

He was the shadow in the corner of the eye
The wild fire on the mountain
The rattle in the chimney
The crying girl in the street

He was a gift
But we made him something else
something nobody counted on

CHORUS STEP AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS

13

LIFT OFF

LIGHTS CHANGE. WE ARE BACK AT KIMBOLTON SCHOOL . SEVERAL 'CHILDREN' ARE OUTSIDE IN A RING PLAYING KNUCKLEBONES ETC.

GIRL 1 (LOOKS UPWARDS) Look! What's that!

BOY 1 (IMPATIENT) Come on, keep playing can't you. Scatters Ones.

GIRLS 2 & 3 What is it? What is it?

GIRL 1 (VERY EXCITED) Like an insect!

GIRL 2 Like a brooch pinned on the sky!

BOY 1 Where?

ALL OF THE CHILDREN ARE JUMPING UP TO LOOK NOW, AND SOME ARE POINTING.

WOMAN 1 RUSHES IN BREATHLESSLY TO THE SCHOOLYARD
I seen, I seen something ... in the air.

MAN 1 Sit down for a bit, Mary. Wait till you get your breath back.

WOMAN 1 (STILL PANTING) It made a noise. Like a hundred egg beaters, all going. And then it come down in Grammer's field, just behind them trees there.

ALL OF THE CAST, EXCEPT JOE, ARE TOGETHER ON STAGE NOW, QUESTIONING EACH OTHER, AND LOOKING UPWARDS.

WOMAN 2 I saw it too. I thought it was the Angel Gabriel himself dropping out of the sky, coming to blow the last trump. I don't know how it stays up there, flimsy little bit of nothing. It never stayed in Grammer's field long. It's getting louder. Listen! (PAUSE) It's starting off into the sky again now!

GIRL 1 Where is it! I want to see ...

BOY 2 It's one of them new planes!

A PICTURE OF HOUDINI'S VOISIN BIPLANE IN FLIGHT IS PROJECTED ON TO THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE. THE LETTERS OF HOUDINI'S NAME ARE CLEARLY VISIBLE ON THE SIDE OF THE BOX WING AND THE BOX TAIL OF THE PLANE

MAN 1 (SPELLS OUT THE LETTERS) H o u d i n i. Y'can see the letters. It's Houdini!

MAN 2 (EXCITED) It's come to pick up Joe. I know it. It's Houdini there, come to pick up Joe from wherever he's been hiding!

ALL (FACE THE SCREEN AND CALL OUT) Houdini! Houdini! Joe! Wait for us! Don't go yet! Joe! Please don't go!

CHILDREN Up! It's going up! It's getting smaller and smaller. It's going away from us!

CHILDREN CONTINUE TO POINT AND WAVE AS HOUDINI'S BIPLANE SLOWLY FADES FROM THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE. LIGHTS CHANGE.

CHORUS So that was that.
Joe went soaring up through the clouds

CHILDREN Up, like a paper bag, blowing
this way and that, in the wind

ALL And he came down
In America

VOICE 1 Or Venezuela

VOICE 2 Or in Lapland

ALL Or he's still up there
with Houdini

The real Joe had gone for good,
away, where we would never find him
But our Joe, he's still here with us
still changing still growing
and we're making sure
that we're keeping him

ATMOSPHERIC 'GHOSTLY' MUSIC. THE HUGE SHADOW OF JOE IS PROJECTED ONCE MORE ON THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE.

CAST ALL SING
TOGETHER *Take shelter, take shelter
Pawelka has come
With bare foot unwelcome
he'll shoulder his gun.
At night
you can hear all the shots.*

*Across the Ruahine tops
he will run!*

THE SONG 'TAKE SHELTER' IS REPEATED ONE MORE TIME.
THEN MEMBERS OF THE CAST DO A STYLISED BOW AND EXIT
THE STAGE FORMALLY IN SINGLE FILE



Chorus: People of the Manawatu



Lizzie



Joe and Lizzie



Houdini



Capture at Ashhurst



Joe in the dock

Smoke and Mirrors
(Revised version)
(November 2012)

A play by Carol Markwell

SMOKE AND MIRRORS

SMOKE AND MIRRORS IS A DREAM PLAY SET LARGELY IN THE MIND OF THE MANAWATU OUTLAW JOSEPH (JOE) PAWELKA.

THE SIDES AND BACK OF THE STAGE ARE DRAPED WITH BLACK VELVET AND FLANKED WITH A VARIETY OF LARGE MIRRORS, AS IN A VAUDEVILLE SHOW

JOE'S CELL IS CENTRE STAGE. ITS WALLS ARE SUGGESTED RATHER THAN REAL SO THAT HE IS FREE TO MOVE OUTSIDE WHEN THE ACTION OF THE PLAY REQUIRES IT. THE CAST NEVER LEAVE THE STAGE AND FUNCTION TOGETHER AS A KIND OF CHORUS OR ENSEMBLE, SINGING, CHANTING, CALLING OUT OR PERFORMING FRAGMENTS OF MUSIC HALL ROUTINES WHEN NOT PLAYING INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.

ALL ACTORS PLAY MULTIPLE ROLES. WHEN NOT ACTING OR 'PERFORMING' CAST MEMBERS STAND STILL, BUT REMAIN CASUALLY GROUPED AND OUT OF THE SPOTLIGHT, AT THE REAR AND SIDE EDGES OF THE STAGE.

THE CAST ARE DRESSED IN THE CLOTHES OF ORDINARY MANAWATU TOWN AND COUNTRY FOLK OF THE PERIOD (1910-11) BUT THEIR FACES ARE SOMEWHAT GARISHLY MADE-UP TO RESEMBLE THOSE OF VAUDEVILLE PERFORMERS.

Cast

Joseph (Joe) Pawelka	24 years	Convicted Manawatu thief, arsonist and outlaw.
Hannah Elizabeth (Lizzie) Wilson	30 years	Joe's ex-wife.
Mother & Father		Joe's parents, living in Kimbolton.
Agnes		Joe's younger sister
Jack		Joe's younger brother
Mrs Wilson		Lizzie's mother.
Lawyer		Palmerston North Courthouse
Judge		Palmerston North Courthouse
Cell mates		Palmerston North police cells and Wellington's Terrace Gaol
Harry Houdini		The American escapologist and showman.
Leonard Hampton		A Palmerston North butcher.
Boys 1&2, Girls 1,2&3		Children at Kimbolton Schoolyard
Child 1 & 2 and Dad		Members of a Manawatu family
Men and Women from the Manawatu community		

ACT ONE PROLOGUE

SILENCE AND DARKNESS ON STAGE, THEN THE SHARP CRACK OF A SINGLE PISTOL SHOT. LIGHTS UP, (BUT SHOWING ONLY DIMLY.)

SMOKE (DRY ICE) DRIFTS ACROSS THE STAGE OBSCURING EVERYTHING FROM VIEW. SLOWLY, OUT THROUGH THIS SMOKE COME THE CHORUS IN A LINE ACROSS THE STAGE. THEY STAND AT THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND SPEAK DIRECTLY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE. AS THE CHORUS SPEAK, LIGHTS BEGIN TO PAN VERY SLOWLY UP ON JOE, WHO IS IN THE POLICE CELLS BEHIND THEM. (NB THIS SECTION IS SPOKEN IN CHORIC VERSE)

CHORUS

VOICE 1 He was a gift.

ALL Find him, catch him!

VOICE 2 He came to us
out of the ice and the rain
and the unforgiving Spring.

ALL We are ordinary people
of the Manawatu
Raumai, Feilding,
Palmerston North
Ashhurst

We sweep our floors
We plant potatoes
We talk on street corners
We eat too much
We go to choir practice
Sometimes we get drunk..

He came into our world
out of the drenched paddocks
out of the freezing nights
out of the abattoir at Awapuni

He came out of rejection
He came out of the Manawatu River
He came into our houses
where we hunched in front of our fires

Just for a while

he stood beside us.
He was darkness
and we longed for him.

BUTCHER I am a butcher, I wanted to make him work.

PRIEST I am a priest, I wanted to reform him.

TEACHER I am a school teacher. I wanted to educate him.

ALL He came into our world
with his guns and his silence
He carried nothing in a sack on his back,
and he robbed us, even of that.

We needed him for the lies we told
We needed him for the pregnant girl,
the shadow in the doorway, the gossip
flowing into the ear and out of the mouth.
We needed him for the crooked deal,
the bill unpaid, the tears in the kitchen,
the lunatic in the main street.

We needed him for the bleakness of the days,
The bent back in the milking shed,
the yellow soap in the washhouse,
the mud on our boots,
the tangled hair in the morning,
the mutton fat on our plate
the cow straining in the paddock
the hungry child in the town.

He was a gift. We needed him.

And when we lost him (PAUSE)
we had to invent him.

CHORUS MOVE BACK SILENTLY OUT OF THE LIGHT. IN THE
CLEARED SPACE WE SEE JOE'S CELL, CENTRE STAGE.

1

POLICE CELLS

LIGHTS UP. IT IS MARCH 1910. JOE IS IN CUSTODY FOR THE
FIRST TIME, IN THE POLICE CELLS AT PALMERSTON NORTH.
THE CELLS ARE CRAMPED, DARK AND UNSANITARY. JOE
AND HIS CELL MATE ARE ARGUING.

JOE .. What would you know.

CELL MATE All I'm saying is, you need to keep your head down. Don't get so shirty

with them.

JOE Bugger that. It's like the Black Hole of Calcutta in here. It's nineteen bloody ten. I'll be an old man before I see the light of day. I've got to get out.

CELL MATE You just lie low, mate. Remember what you're in here for. All that stuff you pinched. Somebody has to pay for it.

CAST (CALL OUT IN TURN FROM THE DARKNESS)
Burglary of Harold Cooper's house.
Theft of a bicycle from Ira Gordon.
Theft of a clock.
Theft of crockery, silver, hearth rugs and kettles.
What about my 350 cigars!
A set of silver hair brushes.
Breaking and entering the house of Mrs Mckay
Burning down the house of Mrs McKay.
(LOUDER) Remanded in custody!

CELL MATE Christ! I'm just a D.I.C. Ha Ha. Woke up in here with a king-sized headache. Too much to drink before closing time. Did you really do all that?

JOE (OFF-HAND) Nah ... A cobbler sold them to me. But I never kept anything to prove it. Stupid.

CELL MATE Some cobbler. SILENCE, THEN

JOE I was nowhere near the old girl's house when it went up. I was miles away, at Stoney Creek, shooting rabbits.

CELLMATE Yeah?

JOE I'm a crack shot. I can hit anything, once I get my eye in. Only, they took away my pistol when they shoved me into this dump.

CELL MATE (INTERESTED, AND SOMEWHAT IMPRESSED) Go on! Well I'll tell you something Joe, and I'll tell you it for free. I been in this lock-up before. If you really want to get out soon, just keep a looky out. The coppers aren't always that smart at locking up the front door.

JOE (SHORTLY) Thanks. I gotta get home for a bit.

CELL MATE Where's that?

JOE Kimbolton. (LIGHTS DOWN ON JOE'S CELL)

2

KIMBOLTON SCHOOLYARD THE CAST HAVE BECOME CHILDREN. JOE AND SOME OF HIS PRIMER CLASSMATES ARE SITTING TOGETHER HAVING LUNCH. ONE BOY HAS A BAG OF MARBLES.

GIRL 1 You boys are being mean to us. Come on, you gotta let us play.

BOY 1 I say you can't.

GIRL 2 Why not?

BOY 1 'Cos I'm the boss of this game...

GIRL 1 You are not!

BOY 1 'Cos my father's a farmer. He rides round all day on a big black horse called Darkie. He can lift a fifty pound bag of spuds. And put it on his back.

JOE My father's stronger than your father.

BOY 1 Is not.

JOE Is so.

GIRL 1 He is not!

JOE It's true. It's true. He can lift a hunderd pound sack. On his own.
'CHILDREN' ALL LOOK AT JOE. HE KNOWS HE HAS THE FLOOR.

GIRL 2 (BEGINS) My father... (SHE IS INTERRUPTED BY JOE)

JOE Where we used to come from ... one day a big lion got loosed and it ran down the street and everyone was scared and my father caught it and whacked it on the bum. Like this (MIMES). An then he rode it, round and round, till it got too tired, an then he came home.

JOE IS WARMING TO HIS THEME

He's brave too. He can fight bears all on his own without nobody else ..

OLD FASHIONED SCHOOL BELL RINGS. JOE STAYS ON THE SCHOOL BENCH. HE WATCHES THE NEXT SEQUENCE, FASCINATED, WHILE OTHER CHILDREN RUN BACK INTO THE SHADOWS.

MUSIC HALL/VAUDEVILLE SEQUENCE: THESE SEQUENCES ARE PERFORMED DIRECTLY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE. PERFORMER 1 IS HALF WAY THROUGH HIS MONOLOGUE. PERFORMERS 2 - 6 JUGGLE, OR POSE AS

STRONG MEN OR WOMEN, OR CREATE A LIVING TABLEAU,
USING THEIR BODIES.

PERFORMER 1

(LARGE. MUSIC HALL STYLE)

...There were one great big Lion called Wallace;
His nose were all covered with scars –
He lay in a somnolent posture,
With the side of his face on the bars.

So straightway the brave little feller,
Not showing a morsel of fear,
Took his stick with its 'orse's 'ead 'andle
And pushed it in Wallace's ear.

You could see that the Lion didn't like it,
For giving a kind of a roll,
He pulled Albert inside the cage with 'im
And swallowed the little lad 'ole .

The manager wanted no trouble,
He (SLOWER AND FADING TO VERY SOFT) took out his purse
right away ...

LIGHTS DOWN ON MUSIC HALL. YOUNG JOE ARRIVES
HOME IN KIMBOLTON. MOTHER IS KNITTING.

JOE

(EXCITEDLY) Mum! Mum! I found a sixpence. On the road outside
Hansens. Look! (OPENS HIS HAND AND SHOWS MOTHER) I'm
giving it you Mum.

MOTHER

Joe, you're a good boy to do that for your mother. (SIGHS)
Now your father's out of work again we don't have anything to come
and go on. (SIGHS AGAIN AND BRUSHES THE HAIR OUT OF
HER EYES) What would I do without you. (PUTS AN ARM
AROUND JOE'S SHOULDER AND HUGS HIM)

JOE

Mum, I got top in sums today. The headmaster gave me a big tick on
my work and all the other kids clapped. Teacher says I'm her best
pupil.

MOTHER

(KNITTING AGAIN) It's very good that you're working so well at
school. (SHE SMILES APPROVINGLY AT JOE).

JOE (EXCITED)

When I grow up I'm going to get lots of money. And I'm going to wear
flash clothes, an have a gold ring, an shoot all the robbers with my gun.
I'm going to be a policeman. I'm going to travel with my circus act.
All over the world. I'm going to do magic. I'm going to be famous...

MOTHER

(ABSENTLY – SHE IS LOOKING AT HER KNITTING) Remember,
God sees you whatever you do.

JOE See my card trick. Agnes! Ja-ack! JOE'S SISTER AND BROTHER JOIN HIM. MOTHER LOOKS ON. JOE PICKS UP A PACK OF CARDS AND SHUFFLES IT RATHER CLUMSILY.

JOE (HOLDS OUT THE PACK TO AGNES) Pick a card.

AGNES Why should I.

JOE Come on Agnes, any old card. (SHE PICKS ONE OUT AND LOOKS AT IT)

JOE Now, give it to me. (SHE DOES SO. JOE MAKES A SHOW OF INSERTING THE CARD INTO THE MIDDLE OF THE PACK BUT SECRETLY TUCKS IT IN AT THE BOTTOM. HE TURNS HIS BACK ON HIS SIBLINGS, PEEPS AT THE CARD, THEN MAKES A GREAT SHOW OF RESHUFFLING THE PACK.

JOE Do you want to know what your card was? (AGNES AND JACK NOD, EAGERLY) It was... (PRODUCES IT WITH SOME EFFORT AND THEN WITH A FLOURISH) It was the nine of diamonds!

JACK How did ya do that? Tell us Joe.

AGNES Why don't you tell us Joe.

JOE (SLYLY) I got ways. A magician never tells his secrets

MOTHER (SMILES FONDLY) You're a clever boy, Joe.

JOE STANDS IN THE CENTRE OF THE ROOM AND BEGINS DECLAIMING. THE OTHERS LOOK ON, ADMIRINGLY.

JOE There were one big Lion called Wallace,
His nose were all covered wiv scars
He lay in a som... som ...nent posture
Wiv the side of his face on the bars

You .. you could see that the Lion didn't like it,
For giving a kind of a roll,
He pulled Albert ... inside the cage wiv 'im
And swallowed the little lad 'ole.

And ... and ... (FADES AWAY)

3 POLICE CELL PALMERSTON NORTH
SEMI DARKNESS. JOE IS INSPECTING THE CELL 'DOOR'.

JOE (MUSING) ... And swallowed the little lad ... whole.

CELL MATE What was that?

JOE I'm getting out of here.

THERE ARE TWO METAL BUCKETS NEAR THE CELL DOOR. JOE STACKS ONE ON TOP OF THE OTHER AND USES BOTH TO 'CLIMB' OVER THE PRISON YARD WALL. TEMPORARILY FREED, HE SEIZES AN OLD BICYCLE FROM THE REAR OF THE STAGE AND RIDES ROUND AND ROUND THE PERIMETER OF THE STAGE, FASTER AND FASTER WITH THE REST OF THE CAST FOLLOWING HIM. (THIS EPISODE WILL HAVE A SURREALLY 'KEYSTONE COPS' ELEMENT.) EVENTUALLY JOE IS CAUGHT AND RESTRAINED.

POLICEMAN 1 Got him!

POLICEMAN 2 Come here you little ... Houdini. By Christ you won't play the same kind of trick again. We'll put you into the Terrace Gaol in Wellington. Then you'll find out what it's all about!

THE TWO POLICEMEN FROGMARCH JOE BACK INTO HIS CELL AND MIMIC LOCKING THE DOOR. JOE SLOUCHES ON HIS SEAT, GLUMLY.

CELL MATE Back again.

JOE (FLATLY). Yeah. Well I nearly had them though. I nearly had them. I'm buggered now. It was bloody cold out there.

CELL MATE You got a missus? Did you see her?

JOE Yeah, I mean no, I never saw her.

CELL MATE (CURIOSLY) Young, aren't you to have a missus,

JOE Yeah. We got married last year. Here, in Palmerston.

LIGHTS CHANGE. LIZZIE APPEARS AND SITS DOWN BESIDE JOE. ONLY JOE CAN SEE HER. SHE IS STITCHING A BEDSPREAD. SHE SPREADS THE FABRIC OUT OVER HER LAP AND BENDS OVER IT AS SHE SEWS. IT IS THE FIRST WEEK OF THEIR MARRIAGE.

JOE Giddy Lizzie. What're you doing there?

LIZZIE
HIM) I'm stitching. It's going to be a bedspread. For us. See, (SHOWS it's got this star pattern in the middle. The blue goes nice with the grey. It's all in backstitch ...

JOE Good old Lizzie. Come on up town with me now. You can wait in the tearooms if you want to.

LIZZIE (STILL SEWING) I need to finish the bedspread. To keep us warm. It's so cold in this house at night. We're going to freeze without it.

JOE Mm

LIZZIE Joe, I do wish you wouldn't call me that.

JOE What?

LIZZIE Old Lizzie. Mum doesn't like it. She says it sounds cheap.

JOE Y' don't have to listen to your Mum all the time. You're married to me now.

LIZZIE It's so strange all day when I'm here on my own. Noisy, you know. Not like Ashhurst.

JOE Silly old girl. I'll get my mate Archie to come round and bring us some firewood. (PAUSE) Now you come here and give us a kiss. (LIZZIE LEANS OVER AND KISSES JOE)

JOE And you can give us that too.

JOE REACHES FOR THE BEDSPREAD AND PULLS IT AWAY FROM LIZZIE. HE WRAPS IT AROUND HIMSELF WHILE LIZZIE DRIFTS AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS.

4 **KIMBOLTON.** MOTHER, YOUNG JOE, AND JACK AND AGNES ARE SITTING AROUND THE FIREPLACE. THEY HOLD THEIR HANDS OUT TO THE FIRE'S WARMTH.

AGNES (ENTREATS) Tell us one of your stories, Joe. You always tell such good stories. Ple-ease. Pretty please.

JACK LOOKS AT MOTHER WHO NODS.

JACK Come on, old Joe.

JOE BEGINS HIS STORY IN 'ONCE UPON A TIME' FAIRYTALE MODE.
There once was a boy, called... Joseph. And he was the strongest, and cleverest and bravest person in all of the world. ... The totara trees in the bush bent down their branches when he walked past them. Even the birds and animals used to do what he said. Everything did what he said. And this boy, this boy used to go off on adventures. He marched through the jungle, with only a monkey as a faithful servant and a guide. When bank robbers came along, he shot them with his six-gun. He made

the town safe for his mother and his brother and his sister Agnes.
One day ...

AGNES (EAGERLY) Tell us about the girl, Joe. You haven't told us about the girl. That's the best bit.

JOE ... one day, he met a girl and she was the most beautiful girl in the whole wide world. She was so beautiful that birds sang in the trees for her. And Joseph said to the girl will you marry me and come and live with me in my house the woods? And the girl shook out her long brown hair and said, yes I will. And so they got married.

AGNES And she had a wedding dress made of white silk.

JOE And he had fine swanky clothes ... and he rode a big black horse called Darkie.

FATHER (ENTERS ABRUPTLY) Yes. And I'm the king of Spain. Sitting round telling stories. A great lump of a boy like you. Twelve years old. Why don't you get out and get yourself a job. Do something useful for a change. Earn your keep in this house.

JOE But I'm smart. I'm good at school, teacher says ...

FATHER Teacher says nothing! You can go for a butcher, like your Uncle John.

MOTHER AND FATHER DRIFT BACK INTO THE SHADOWS.

5 PRISON CELL WELLINGTON

JOE SITS SLUMPED AT THE TABLE IN HIS CELL.

CELL MATE Cheer up Joe. Your sister brought in some more books for you. Let's see...(LOOKS AT THE BOOK TITLES) You got *Pick* ... something

JOE (BECOMING MORE INTERESTED) *Pickwick Papers*?

CELLMATE Yeah, and *America at Work*. I wish I could read like you do. It would help, you know, pass the time.

JOE Once I got this book, by an American chap called Houdini. *Handcuff Secrets*. I read it till it fell to bits. God, I could've done with it in here. (LAUGHS BITTERLY) He's a clever bloke. Magician.

HOUDINI APPEARS, BUT ONLY JOE CAN SEE HIM.
IN THIS NEXT SECTION HOUDINI AND JOE SPEAK IN UNISON

HOUDINI I defy death. I'm a headline act in vaudeville.

JOE He defies death. He's a headline act in vaudeville.

JOE & HOUDINI
(TOGETHER)

I open locks with cunning and with concealed keys. I can get out of riveted boilers, mail bags, milk cans - nothing can hold me. I am a master of illusion. Once I made a full grown elephant and its trainer disappear. My most famous act is my escape from the Chinese Water Torture Cell. What more can I not accomplish! (FADES TO SOFT) And I love my old mother more than anything else in the world.

HOUDINI SWEEPS AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS, LEAVING JOE STARING AFTER HIM

CELL MATE Y'know, you're not a bad bloke, Joe, but sometimes you talk very weird...

JOE I want to be out of here now. I want to put the clock back. I want to start again.

LIGHTS DOWN. JOE IS STILL SITTING AT THE TABLE IN HIS CELL, BUT HE IS REMEMBERING ONE OF HIS EARLIEST JOBS AS A BUTCHER IN DANNEVIRKE. 'YOUNGER' JOE IS WRITING A LETTER TO HIS MOTHER. HE SPEAKS THE WORDS ALOUD AS HE WRITES.

JOE My dear Mother, since I came here to Dannevirke I have got a job butchering in the town and I intend to stick to it if I don't have a row with the boss. Oh Mother, what about the photo you promised me I should like to have a separate one of the lot of you Agnes, Jack and yourself. (PAUSE) I expect if I were to go back I should find nearly all strangers and all the young fellows married by what I have heard ... the fools are mad and don't know what they are doing never mind we all have to go through the mill once they find women out as I have they won't trouble their heads about them ...

THREE BUTCHERS APPEAR, IN STAINED BUTCHERS' APRONS AND HATS. ONE IS LEONARD HAMPTON, A PREVIOUS EMPLOYER, (MANAGER OF BANKS & CO, BUTCHERY IN THE SQUARE.)
THE BUTCHERS STAND AROUND JOE, ACCUSINGLY.

HAMPTON You're sacked, Joe Pawelka. I'm not having you round here any more.

JOE (HOTLY) I do my job don't I. I work hard in this shop.

HAMPTON Y' don't talk to me like that, Pawelka! I can't trust you. You tell nothing but lies. All the time. And you can take that stupid smile off your face. I don't like the look of you and I don't like the sound of you. I've had enough. You can take your wages and go.

JOE (MUTTERS UNDER HIS BREATH) Old bastard. (THEN) What am I

going to tell Lizzie?

LIZZIE APPEARS FROM THE SHADOWS. ONLY JOE IS ABLE TO SEE AND RESPOND TO HER.

JOE I've come into a bit of money, Lizzie.. We'll go away somewhere. Have ourselves a holiday. You can have some flash new clothes. All the fellows say
Napier's a grand place...

LIZZIE (SHAKES HIS ARM OFF) You make things up, Joe Pawelka. You live in a fantasy world.

JOE Old Hampton says I'm the best worker he ever had.

LIZZIE You liar! You don't even have a job any more. Mrs Hampton told Mum and she told me, which is more than you did. I don't want to see you till you find some more work and you start telling the truth to me.

JOE Y'know Lizzie, my friend Archie McCrae. The one from Shannon. He and me. We're going into the furniture business. We're started already. We're going to be big in the Manawatu. You won't see us for dust.

LIZZIE Big. What with? There's no money Joe. There never has been. I can't even pay the grocer. It's ... shaming. I can't take any more of this, Joe.

JOE Stay with me Lizzie. You have to.

LIZZIE You lie to me. All the time. You're not being fair to me Joe.

JOE (ENTREATING) We got on alright. We had some good times didn't we. Down at the hall. All the singing and that.

LIZZIE (BITTERLY) Precious few. (SHE TURNS AWAY FROM HIM)

AS LIZZIE SPEAKS THIS LINE THE REST OF THE CAST MOVE FORWARD. THEY LINK ARMS TOGETHER AS MUSIC HALL/ VAUDEVILLE PERFORMERS, AND SWAY IN TIME TO THE MUSIC AS THEY SING

CAST (SING) *Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,
I'm half crazy all for the love of you.
It won't be a stylish marriage,
I can't afford a carriage,
But you'll look sweet, upon the seat
Of a bicycle built for two ...*

JOE (TO LIZZIE) You used to like a good singsong.

PERFORMER 2 STEPS FORWARD, HANDS CLASPED IN

CLASSIC 'SINGER' POSE, AND BEGINS TO SING. AS SHE SINGS, JOE PUTS HIS ARM TENTATIVELY AROUND LIZZIE'S WAIST. SHE IS RELUCTANT AT FIRST BUT DOES NOT MOVE AWAY FROM HIM.

PERFORMER 2
SINGS

*Just a song at twilight
When the lights are low
And the flick-ring shadows
Softly come and go.
Though the heart be weary
Sad the day and long
Still to us at twilight
Comes love's old song
Comes lo-o-ove's old song*

THE CAST MOVE BACK TO THEIR SEATS IN THE SHADOWS.
LIZZIE PULLS AWAY FROM JOE.

LIZZIE I'm not staying with you, Joe. You tell too many stories. Mum says ...

JOE (ANGRILY) What am I supposed to do?

LIZZIE I don't know and I don't care. You better move into a boarding house. There's plenty in town. Or go back to your people in Kimbolton.

LIZZIE MOVES AWAY AS MOTHER MOVES INTO THE LIGHT.
SHE CARRIES A SMALL MIRROR.

MOTHER Joe, did you break my best china cup with the blue roses.

JOE No, no, it wasn't me. I told you. I wasn't anywhere near it. I was out in the garden. Jack and Agnes did it when they were playing with it last Sunday.

MOTHER (SADLY) Jack and Agnes took the punishment for it, but it was you all the time, you who broke it.

JOE (HOTLY) I never did.

MOTHER Have a look in this mirror. (MOTHER HOLDS UP THE MIRROR AND JOE RELUCTANTLY LOOKS AT HIS REFLECTION)
That is the face that God sees. That is the face of a liar.
Always remember Joe, when you tell a lie to me, you are lying to God.

MOTHER DRIFTS OUT OF THE LIGHT, CALLING BACK

MOTHER You need to tell him that you are sorry for what you did.

JOE (ONCE SHE IS OUT OF EARSHOT) It was only a stupid cup.

CAST (CHANT TOGETHER SOFTLY) *Liar, liar, your pants are on fire*
Liar, liar, your pants are on fire

A BURST OF MUSIC. SIX BUTCHERS DANCE INTO THE LIGHT, ARMS LINKED. THEY MOVE TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND TELL THE FOLLOWING JOKES VERY RAPIDLY AND THEATRICALY TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE

PERFORMER 1 I say I say I say. Are your relatives in business?

PERFORMER 2 Yes, in the iron and steel business.

PERFORMER 1 Oh, indeed.

PERFORMER 2 Yes, me mother irons and me father steals!

CAST (ALL) Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha!

PERFORMER 3 Do you serve lobsters?

PERFORMER 4 I serve anybody, Sir.

PERFORMER 5 We 'ad two windmills on our farm, but we took one down.

PERFORMER 6 Why was that?

PERFORMER 5 There wasn't enough wind for two!

PERFORMER 1 I say I say I say. How can I get rid of some ugly fat?

PERFORMER 2 I don't know. How can you get rid of some ugly fat?

PERFORMER 1 Send her home to mother!

CAST (ALL) Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha! BUTCHERS LINK ARMS AND DANCE AWAY.

6 GAOL BREAK

JOE REMAINS SLUMPED IN HIS CELL IN THE HALF DARK. LIZZIE REAPPEARS

JOE STRETCHES OUT HIS HANDS TO HER Lizzie, I want you.

LIZZIE When you touch me your hands smell like meat.

JOE HALF SHOUTING HALF SOBBING I work in a bloody abattoir.

What did you expect!

LIZZIE I hate you when you get like this!

JOE Do you think I like it.. working in that stinking place all day, with the guts and the smell and the blood round your feet. You made me take that abattoir job. It was what you wanted. You can't turn round now and complain!

LIZZIE You've got to go. Pick up your stuff ... and you can take that gun with you! The one you never told me about. (MEANINGFULLY) That I had to find. In the washhouse.

JOE (CRIES OUT) Lizzie! ... (HELPLESSLY) I'm warning you Lizzie ...

JOE SINKS HIS HEAD IN HIS HANDS .

LIZZIE What else have you done that I don't know about? I'm not staying, Joe. I'm going back to Ashhurst. To be with Mum.

JOE What're you going to do then?

LIZZIE If you were even half of a real man you'd look after me. You wouldn't keep losing all those jobs. Mum says ...

JOE (INTERRUPTS HER) I slog my guts out for you. What more do you want!

LIZZIE I'm pregnant, Joe. SHE STARTS TO WALK AWAY INTO THE DARKNESS. JOE STARES AFTER HER.

JOE Wait Lizzie! I did it for you. All that stuff for the house. I got it together so's you'd stay with me.

LIZZIE You stole it. Stole it. Stole it. All those chairs, all those pictures. That carpet, the lamp and the bed. You're no better than a common thief Joe Pawelka and I wish I'd known... (SHE WALKS AWAY OUT OF THE LIGHT)

JOE (WAILS) Curse you Lizzie! You should've stayed!

CELL MATE So what are you going to do now?

JOE SHAKES HIS HEAD HELPLESSLY, THEN STOOPS TO PICK SOMETHING UP FROM THE FLOOR. HE INSPECTS IT CLOSELY. IT IS A WOMAN'S HAIR PIN (THE OLD-FASHIONED KIND, WITH TWO PARALLEL METAL PRONGS).

JOE She left her bloody hairclip.

SLOWLY HE PRISES THE TWO ENDS APART UNTIL HE IS LEFT WITH ONE LONG THIN PIECE OF WIRE. HE HOLDS IT UP, THOUGHTFULLY.

A man could do something with this. A man could ...

DEFTLY, HE USES THE WIRE TO TWIST AND PROD AT THE 'LOCK' ON HIS CELL DOOR. IN A FEW SECONDS HE IS FREE. HE LOOKS AROUND CAUTIOUSLY THEN DISAPPEARS INTO THE SHADOWS AT THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

CELL MATE (LACONICALLY) See ya, mate.

IMMEDIATELY THE CRY GOES UP

CAST (IN TURN) Pawelka's out again! Escaped from the Terrace Gaol!

Pawelka's on the loose! Lock your doors!

Trail of robberies! Seen in Longburn! Back in the Manawatu!

Seen in Feilding!

Pawelka! Pawelka! etc.

CHOREOGRAPHED PANDEMONIUM ON STAGE AS ALL OF THE CAST, EXCEPT LIZZIE AND JOE, JOIN IN THE FEVERISH AND WIDESPREAD SEARCH FOR HIM. WHEN WE CATCH OCCASIONAL GLIMPSES OF JOE IN THE MELEE HE IS WEARING A HAT AND A LONG WINTER OVERCOAT. THE UPROAR BUILDS TO A CLIMAX AS TWO OF THE SEARCHERS FACE EACH OTHER CHALLENGINGLY IN THE HALF DARKNESS.

SEARCHER 1 (SHOUTS) I've got him! He's mine! (HE FIRES AT POINT BLANK RANGE)

SEARCHER 2 FALLS TO THE GROUND. TWO OTHER SEARCHERS CROUCH DOWN TO EXAMINE HIM.

SEARCHER 3 My God. You've shot the wrong man.

COMPLETE SILENCE. THEN THE DEAD MAN IS LIFTED OR DRAGGED SLOWLY OUT INTO THE DARKNESS. *THIS CAN BE DONE QUITE FORMALLY WITH LIGHTS DOWN AND THE CAST IN SLOW PROCESSION BEHIND THE BODY. IF POSSIBLE, SOME SOFTLY MOURNFUL MUSIC CAN BE PLAYING. THE CAST MAY END THIS SEQUENCE BY STANDING QUIETLY, OR BY ALL LYING DOWN ON STAGE 'SLEEPING'.

AT THIS POINT, IMAGES OF A BURNING BUILDING BEGIN TO BE PROJECTED ON TO A SHEET OR SCREEN HUNG OVER THE

MIRROR AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE. *CHORUS WAKE, AND BEGIN CHANTING. THEY CONTINUE AS THE FIRE ON THE SCREEN INCREASES IN INTENSITY. IN THE DARKNESS WE SEE JOE PAWELKA STANDING WITH BOTH ARMS UPRAISED. HE HAS HIS BACK TO THE THEATRE AUDIENCE AND HIS FACE TO THE FLAMES.

*CHORUS

VOICE 1 What is that noise?

VOICE 2 Go inside now,
shut the door.

VOICES 3 & 4 Burning, burning.

ALL Look at it! See it!
Smoke licks its way into
every crevice of the night

The fuel laid on the fire
The hot force of it
singeing, searing
My eyes burn.
The whip of flames
Palmerston North
our town lit up
and the brain, swarming
surging, burning

The clanging bell
The fiery night, exploding
with heat and beauty (PAUSE)

The ashes in the morning
the grey dust in the chimney

7

ASHHURST

LIGHTS UP STAGE LEFT. WE ARE AT LIZZIE'S MOTHER'S HOUSE IN A REMOTE PART OF ASHHURST. JOE STANDS CASUALLY WITH HIS BACK TO THE FIRE PLACE. HE HAS BROKEN INTO THE HOUSE. LIZZIE AND HER MOTHER, HANNAH WILSON, COME IN TO CHECK ON THE NOISE. MRS WILSON SCREAMS.

JOE Don't be afraid, Mother ... (MRS WILSON RUSHES OUT TO GET

HELP)

JOE (URGENTLY) Lizzie, I have to talk to you.

LIZZIE You burnt down a school. You burnt down a furniture warehouse. You burnt down a men's clothing shop in the Square. Why did you do it Joe? Why?

JOE You've got my kid. That lump there in your belly. Lizzie, why won't you stick with me! We can make it up. We can do better. Just give it a try for once. You're squeezing my heart.

JOE REACHES FOR HER

LIZZIE RECOILS FROM HIM I despise you, Joe. I despise the stupid way you talk. You are never going to see me again. Now go!

JOE You cow! You want to know why I call you old Lizzie? It's because you are old. Old and dried up. No-one else would have you till I came along. No-one else would want you!

LIZZIE (STRICKEN) You .. you crawled to me. You begged me!

SHE TRIES TO SLAP JOE

JOE No you don't! HE GRABS AT HER ARM AND PUSHES HER AWAY ROUGHLY

LIZZIE You'd even hit a woman ... you sneaking coward! What would you do to our child!

SHE HAS TOUCHED A RAW NERVE. JOE HATES ANY SIGN OF COWARDICE. LIZZIE TURNS ON HER HEEL AND MOVES AWAY OUT OF THE LIGHT. JOE WILL NOT SEE HER AGAIN.

JOE BEGINS ' WRITING' THE LETTER HE WAS TO LEAVE IN AN EMPTY MILK BILLY IN ASHHURST, SAYING THE WORDS ALOUD AS HE WRITES.

JOE To the manhunters of Ashhurst. (PAUSE) ... I might also state that a good many of the happenings of late that have been blamed on me are false. I also heard P. Hanlon say while within one yard of me that I shot at my wife this morning. That is also a foul lie, and he went near getting a bullet in his head for his pains. Excuse this writing for I have only a pointed bullet to scrawl with.
Signed, J. Pawelka, a man against the world.

FATHER (CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) Go out and get a real job. A big lump of a boy like you.

LIZZIE (CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) I despise you Joe. I despise

everything about you.

MOTHER (CALLS FROM THE DARKNESS) Never, never quarrel with God.

JOE GATHERS HIS LONG COAT AROUND HIM. HE HAS BEEN ON THE RUN FOR SEVERAL DAYS NOW AND IT IS THE MIDDLE OF WINTER AND VERY COLD. HE HUDDLES DOWN IN AN ASHHURST COWSHED WITH A HALF EMPTY BOTTLE OF STOUT. HE IS WARY. HE HOLDS A STOLEN REVOLVER IN ONE HAND. FROM TIME TO TIME HE CHECKS HIS WATCH. GRADUALLY HE BEGINS TO SLUMP AND SLEEP.

8 CAPTURE

IT IS 6.30AM. TWO SEARCHERS HAVE SPOTTED PAWELKA SLEEPING. THEY WALK QUIETLY TOWARDS HIM BUT HE WAKES AND RAISES HIS GUN. SEARCHER 1 QUICKLY KNOCKS IT OUT OF HIS HAND AND DISARMS HIM. SEARCHERS 1 AND 2 HANDCUFF JOE AND MARCH HIM BETWEEN THEM.

JOE Bloody cowards!

HE KICKS OUT AND STRUGGLES TO GET AWAY

JOE Do you think I'm a coward? (POINTS TO HIS HANDCUFFS) If so, take these off and I'll show you!

SEARCHER 1 It's all right Joe. You wouldn't shoot a man.

SEARCHER 2 No. Then who shot poor McGuire?

SEARCHER 1 Come on Joe. Turn out your pockets. What've you got in there?

JOE (DESPAIRING) This is hell on earth. Why didn't you put a bullet into me? Put one in now and they will think that I did it myself.

JOE TURNS OUT HIS POCKETS. HE HAS BEEN CARRYING DETONATORS AND SPARE AMMUNITION, STOLEN POSTAL NOTES, THE STOUT AND ANOTHER GUN.

SEARCHER 2 What's this in your top pocket. PULLS OUT A PHOTOGRAPH. Who's this?

JOE My wife Lizzie, and her mother. (PAUSE) I wanted to see my wife, and then I would have put a bullet into myself. She is an affectionate wife. My wife has lead me to this. My heart is broken. I can feel nothing.

SEARCHER 1 You haven't been very smart, Joe. You're going to be remanded in

custody. Then you're going back to gaol for a long time and this time you won't get away.

JOE I'm going to be on trial for my life. Why don't you give me poison instead, to finish me off.

SEARCHER 2 The trouble you've caused us, that's not a bad idea, Pawelka.

9 PALMERSTON NORTH COURTHOUSE.

JOE STANDS IN THE DOCK. HIS HANDS ARE MANACLED. LAWYER AND JUDGE APPEAR AND STAND ON WOODEN BOXES, STAGE LEFT, SO THAT THEY SEEM TO TOWER OVER HIM. THEIR FACES ARE CHALK WHITE AND HEAVILY LINED WITH BLACK.

LAWYER John Joseph Thomas Pawelka, you have been charged with theft of a butcher's steel ...

IN THIS NEXT SEGMENT THE REMAINDER OF THE CAST SEATED AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE HAVE BECOME MEMBERS OF THE PALMERSTON NORTH PUBLIC CALLING OUT SOME OF JOE'S VARIOUS CRIMES. THIS IS DONE FAIRLY FAST SO THAT LINES WILL OFTEN OVERLAP.

Burglary of Kendall's house in Foxton Line.
Breaking and entering Arthur Dixon's butchery.
Burning down the Boys' High School in Featherston Street.

LAWYER Escaping from lawful custody.

CAST (LOUDER NOW) Burning down Pegden's Warehouse.
Burning Millar and Giorgi's in the Square.
Burning the house of Helen McKay.

JUDGE (PORTENTOUSLY) You are charged with the murder of Sergeant McGuire.

(THERE IS A GASP FROM THE CROWD THEN COMPLETE SILENCE)

JOE I didn't do it.

LAWYER Sir, in the McGuire shooting I must point out that the evidence is circumstantial. However (HOLDS UP A NOOSE OF THICK ROPE) like this rope, although no strand of evidence is strong enough to support the case on its own, each one contributes to the strength of the whole.

JOE (TOUCHES HIS NECK. SPEAKS MORE SOFTLY) I didn't do it.
(HE STANDS IN THE DOCK, READY FOR SENTENCING).

I am very sorry for the offences I have committed and for which I appear before the Court. I hope you will be as lenient as possible with me. I stole some of those things because I had to exist. I no more stole the furniture than you did, sir. (CAST LAUGHS)

JUDGE Then you should not have pleaded guilty.

JOE (FALTERING) I have had a very hard life, and have practically been on my own since I was thirteen years old. As for the charge of murder, I ...

JUDGE You were acquitted of that.

JOE I know, but people still say I'm guilty. I swear I was never near the place. I would sooner hang than be thought guilty.

JUDGE It is a painful thing to have to pass sentence on a man as young as you are for a series of very serious crimes. But I have to do my duty. You have pleaded guilty to twelve charges of breaking and entering and you have been found guilty of arson. You attempted suicide before your first arrest. I have to protect you against yourself and I have to do more. I have to protect the public against you. (SENTENTIIOUSLY) I declare that you are an habitual criminal and I pronounce a sentence of twenty-one years.

CAST (ECHO THE JUDGE'S WORDS, MENACINGLY)
Twenty-one years
Twenty-one years
Twenty-one years

JOE (SHAKES HIS HEAD IN DISBELIEF. HE SHOUTS) No!

LIGHTS DOWN ON COURT. JOE IS BACK IN HIS CELL, PACING UP AND DOWN.

JOE I never stole all that furniture.

LIZZIE (SOFTLY) Liar, liar.

BUTCHERS (JOIN IN) Liar, liar

ENTIRE CAST Liar, liar, liar, **liar, liar, liar!**

JOE (SHOUTS, WILD-EYED) Stop it! For God's sake!

CELL MATE Shut up, Pawelka!

JOE (CONTINUES PACING) I will not stay in this fuckin' cell for the rest of

my life. I will not do it.

CELL MATE You're clever, Joe. You're picking up boot-making real good. You're cleverer than I am. Look at all them books you read. You got your mother and your sister come and visit you in here often. That's more than my old lady does. There isn't one lag in here that doesn't wish you luck. You gotta think positive. You gotta think how to get by.

JOE (CALMER AND MORE THOUGHTFUL) Yeah. You do
HE PULLS OUT A PACK OF CARDS AND BEGINS TO SPREAD THEM OUT IN FRONT OF HIMSELF.

10

HOUDINI

LIGHTS CHANGE. HOUDINI ENTERS WITH BESS, HIS SHOWGIRL ASSISTANT. HE IS BARE-CHESTED. THERE ARE CHAINS AROUND HIS ARMS AND LEGS AND HEAVY HANDCUFFS AROUND HIS WRISTS. HE IS PERFORMING ONE OF HIS CELEBRATED 'ESCAPES'. JOE MOVES TO JOIN THE REST OF THE CAST AS PART OF HOUDINI'S 'AUDIENCE'.

HOUDINI (SHOWMAN STYLE) La-dies and gen-tle-men, I am Houdini, The King of Handcuffs, The Wizard of Shackles. There's nobody can beat me in the world. I've broken out of coffins, I've broken out of handcuffs, I've broken out of lock-ups in forty states of the Union. My body is made of steel! Good citizens of this town, just to show that my act is gen-u-ine I invite you you to kindly step up close and have a look at these locks. Come on up ladies and gentlemen, come on up ...

SHOW MUSIC BEGINS. ONE OR TWO MEMBERS OF THE 'AUDIENCE' MOVE FORWARD TO CLOSELY EXAMINE THE PADLOCKS AND CHAINS. THE REST CHAT TO EACH OTHER, OR CRANE FORWARD EXCITEDLY TO WATCH THE SHOW.

HOUDINI Ha! La-dies and gen-tle-men, I am about to do something amazing. (CLAPS HIS HANDS AND A LARGE HEAVY RECTANGULAR BOX IS BROUGHT FORWARD FROM THE SIDE OF THE STAGE AND PLACED IN FRONT OF HIM)
Do you see this box. (HE OPENS THE LID) Go on, have a look inside. It's a regular box. No secret panels. (HE AND BESS TILT THE BOX SO THAT THE AUDIENCE CAN SEE).

HOUDINI Now, tie me up real good. (BESS AND OTHERS IN THE AUDIENCE SNAP HANDCUFFS ON HOUDINI'S WRISTS AND TIE HIS ARMS AND LEGS WITH A HEAVY ROPE).

Today, before your very eyes I, Houdini, hog-tied and fettered, will escape from this locked and bolted box.

(HE SLITHERS SOMEWHAT AWKWARDLY INTO THE BOX. BESS SHUTS THE LID AND CLOSES A COUPLE OF HEAVY BOLTS. FINALLY A LARGE PADLOCK ON THE FRONT IS SNAPPED SHUT)

MUSIC BEGINS, SOFTLY AT FIRST. BESS PUTS UP THE THREE-SIDED CURTAIN SCREEN SO THAT THE BOX CAN NO LONGER BE SEEN. THE 'AUDIENCE' BEGIN TO 'OOH' AND 'AH' WITH ANTICIPATION. MUSIC BUILDS TO A CLIMAX. WITH A FLOURISH, BESS REMOVES THE CURTAIN SCREEN TO SHOW HOUDINI, FREED AND SEATED ON TOP OF THE BOX. THE CHAINS AND ROPES ARE AT HIS FEET AND THE BOLTS AND LOCKS OF THE BOX ARE STILL CLEARLY INTACT. HOUDINI BOWS AND WAVES TO THE CROWD, WHO CHEER HIM. HOUDINI PULLS A SHOWER OF BRIGHTLY COLOURED SILK SCARVES FROM HIS SLEEVE AND THROWS THEM TO THE 'AUDIENCE'. HE MOVES BACK INTO THE SHADOWS WITH BESS ON HIS ARM. THE REST OF THE CAST MOVE TOO, TAKING ALL OF HOUDINI'S PROPS WITH THEM. DARKNESS.

11

THE TERRACE GAOL, WELLINGTON

JOE AND CELL MATE ARE BACK IN THEIR CELL. MOTHER AND AGNES HAVE COME TO VISIT.

- MOTHER (GENTLY) Lizzie's had a little girl, Joe. A beautiful little daughter called Iris. Mrs Wilson sent a telegram to let us know.
- AGNES (EAGERLY) Oh Joe, she says the baby's perfect.
- JOE Lizzie ... a girl.
- MOTHER I'm sorry, Joe. She still won't see you. I asked, like you said, but she wants nothing more to do with you....She's going for a divorce.
- JOE What about the baby, Iris. She's my kid too. I have to see her! She's not playing fair with me.
- MOTHER (SIGHS) Nothing is fair in this world. You brought shame on all of us Joe, when you did what you did. Sooner or later somebody has to pay.
- JOE What do you think I'm doing here now, paying and paying.
- MOTHER Just give up any idea of seeing either of them, son. It's not going to happen.
- JOE (MUTTERS TO HIMSELF) We'll see about that.

MOTHER You must get down on your knees and pray to God to make you a better person... Goodbye, Joe.
AGNES AND MOTHER LEAVE JOE AND RETURN TO THE SHADOWS

LIZZIE APPEARS. SHE MOVES TO THE FRONT OF THE STAGE AND SPEAKS THE NEXT MONOLOGUE DIRECTLY TO THE AUDIENCE.

LIZZIE I did love him, you know... we were happy once. We had this little house in Church Street. (PAUSE) Sometimes I don't know why I do the things I do ...

I didn't want all this to happen. It was ... see, he had this chip on his shoulder ... And Mum was at me and at me till I never knew what to say... He'd done too much... (PAUSE)
I knew, once I had the baby, once I had Iris ... I couldn't let him see her. I didn't want her to ever know ...

He had this sort of ... blackness.... So, I had to break away. I had no choice. (MORE SOFTLY, AND TO HERSELF) I had no choice. I stayed in Ashhurst after I had the baby. Where else could I have gone ... but I never, I never stopped thinking about him ...

LIZZIE MOVES BACK OUT OF THE LIGHT AND WE SEE JOE, STILL IN HIS CELL.

ALL OF THE CAST EXCEPT JOE SING OR CHANT TOGETHER THE FOLLOWING MANAWATU CHILDREN'S SKIPPING RHYME. SOME MAY SKIP WITH ROPES AS THEY SING. WHILE THIS IS HAPPENING JOE MIMES SAWING AT THE BARS OF HIS CELL WITH A SMALL HACKSAW BLADE (THE TYPE HE WOULD HAVE HAD ACCESS TO IN THE PRISON BOOT SHOP.) HE SLIPS FREE OF THE CELL BUT IS SOON RECAPTURED BY TWO WARDERS FROM THE CAST, AND IS MARCHED INSIDE

CAST
SING *Skip to me one and skip to me two,
Lizzie's mother is looking at you.
Skip to me three and skip to me four,
Who's that knocking at Wilson's door.
Skip to me five and skip to me six,
I love you I love you but push you away quick!
Skip to me seven and skip to me eight,
I'll push you and push you out of my gate.
It never will work, it was only a dream,
If my mother finds out she and I will scream!*

*Oh, skip to me one and skip to me two,
Lizzie's mother is ...*

SINGING FADES OUT AS JOE IS RETURNED TO HIS CELL

WARDER 1 It's the condemned cell for you now. You'll be watched every fifteen minutes. No more privileges. WARDER LEAVES. THE CELL IS IN DARKNESS

JOE Bastards!

CELL MATE How many times is it this time Joe?

JOE Five. And I'm not giving up.

CELL MATE You're a wizard at escaping. There's no-one can touch you for it. Every man jack here will help you. You know that.

JOE Thanks. I'm just choosing my time.

A LIGHT IS BEING FLASHED INTO JOE'S CELL EVERY FEW MINUTES AS WARDERS CONTINUE TO CHECK ON HIM.

DRUM ROLL. LIGHTS CHANGE. HOUDINI ENTERS WITH A FLOURISH.

HOUDINI La-dies and gen-tle-men always remember. What the eyes see, and the ears hear, the mind believes. My next trick is impossible! In full view, I am about to release myself from the sort of straitjacket that is used on the murderous and insane. Put this heavy old jacket on me, and put it on real good.

BESS AND OTHERS FROM THE CAST STEP FORWARD AND STRAP AND BUCKLE HOUDINI INTO THE STRAITJACKET WITH HIS ARMS CROSSED IN FRONT OF HIM. HOUDINI STANDS CENTRE STAGE. THE REST OF THE CAST, ALL EXCEPT JOE, STAND AROUND HIM WATCHING.

HOUDINI Now. Look carefully ladies and gentlemen. They said it couldn't be done but Houdini will do it and every one of you will see it!

SECOND DRUM ROLL. INSIDE THE HEAVY CANVAS RESTRAINT HOUDINI BEGINS TO WRITHE AND STRAIN. IT TAKES A FIERCE EFFORT. HE MAY EVEN ROLL ALONG THE FLOOR. FINALLY HE HAS FREED HIS HANDS ENOUGH TO ALLOW HIM TO REMOVE THE BUCKLES AT THE FRONT, AND THEN AT THE BACK OF THE STRAIT-JACKET. HE REMOVES THE STRAITJACKET AND WAVES IT TO THE CROWD, WHO CHEER HIM. HOUDINI BOWS TO THE CROWD AND SWEEPS TO THE SIDE OF THE STAGE.

JOE'S CELL IS AGAIN REVEALED. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE PLAY IT IS NOW FULLY LIT. THE CELL IS EMPTY. JOE HAS GONE FOR GOOD.

CHORUS STEPS FORWARD AND SPEAKS TO THE AUDIENCE
(THIS SECTION IS SPOKEN IN CHORIC VERSE)

VOICE 1 Gone!

VOICE 2
(EXCITED) If I could tell it all..

VOICE 3 His crimes burned brightly
 We warmed our hands at them

ALL He was ours
 And we lost him

VOICE 1 He was on a ship to America

VOICE 2 He had joined the army

VOICE 3 He was working in a woolstore in Taranaki

VOICE 4 He was fighting in the trenches in France

VOICE 1 He had drowned at sea

VOICE 4 He was holed-up in the Kaimanawas

VOICE 3 He was no man,

VOICE 2
ALL He was nowhere
 He was everywhere.

He was a gift
But we made him something else
something nobody counted on

CHORUS STEP AWAY INTO THE SHADOWS

13 LIFT OFF

LIGHTS CHANGE. WE ARE BACK AT KIMBOLTON SCHOOL .
SEVERAL 'CHILDREN' ARE OUTSIDE IN A RING PLAYING
KNUCKLEBONES ETC.

GIRL 1 (LOOKS UPWARDS) Look! What's that!

BOY 1 (IMPATIENT) Come on, keep playing can't you. Scatters Ones.

GIRLS 2 & 3 What is it? What is it?

GIRL 1 (VERY EXCITED) Like an insect!

GIRL 2 Like a brooch pinned on the sky!

BOY 1 Where?

 ALL OF THE CHILDREN ARE JUMPING UP TO LOOK NOW, AND
 SOME ARE POINTING.

WOMAN 1 RUSHES IN BREATHLESSLY TO THE SCHOOLYARD
 I seen, I seen something ... in the air.

MAN 1 Sit down for a bit, Mary. Wait till you get your breath back.

WOMAN 1 (STILL PANTING) It made a noise. Like a hundred egg beaters, all
 going. And then it come down in Grammer's field, just behind them
 trees there.

 ALL OF THE CAST, EXCEPT JOE, ARE TOGETHER ON STAGE
 NOW, QUESTIONING EACH OTHER, AND LOOKING UPWARDS.

WOMAN 2 I saw it too. I thought it was the Angel Gabriel himself dropping out of
 the sky, coming to blow the last trump. I don't know how it stays up there,
 flimsy little bit of nothing. It never stayed in Grammer's field long. It's
 getting louder. Listen! (PAUSE) It's starting off into the sky again
 now!

GIRL 1 Where is it! I want to see ...

BOY 2 It's one of them new planes!

 A PICTURE OF HOUDINI'S VOISIN BIPLANE IN FLIGHT IS
 PROJECTED ON TO THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE.
 THE LETTERS OF HOUDINI'S NAME ARE CLEARLY VISIBLE ON
 THE SIDE OF THE BOX WING AND THE BOX TAIL OF THE
 PLANE

MAN 1 (SPELLS OUT THE LETTERS) H o u d i n i. Y'can see the letters. It's
 Houdini!

MAN 2 (EXCITED) It's come to pick up Joe. I know it. It's Houdini there,
 come to pick up Joe from wherever he's been hiding!

ALL (FACE THE SCREEN AND CALL OUT) Houdini! Houdini! Joe! Wait
 for us! Don't go yet! Joe! Please don't go!

CHILDREN Up! It's going up! It's getting smaller and smaller. It's going away
 from us!

CHILDREN CONTINUE TO POINT AND WAVE AS HOUDINI'S BIPLANE SLOWLY FADES FROM THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE. LIGHTS CHANGE.

CHORUS So that was that.
 Joe went soaring up through the clouds

CHILDREN Up, like a paper bag, blowing
 this way and that, in the wind

ALL And he came down
 In America

VOICE 1 Or Venezuela

VOICE 2 Or in Lapland

ALL Or he's still up there
 with Houdini

The real Joe had gone for good,
away, where we would never find him

But our Joe, he's still here with us

and we're making sure
that we're keeping him

ATMOSPHERIC 'GHOSTLY' MUSIC. THE HUGE SHADOW OF A MAN IS PROJECTED ON TO THE SCREEN AT THE REAR OF THE STAGE.

CAST ALL SING
TOGETHER *Take shelter, take shelter*
 Pawelka has come
 With bare foot unwelcome
 he'll shoulder his gun.
 At night
 you can hear all the shots.
 Across the Ruahine tops
 he will run!

At night
You can hear all the shots.
Across the Ruahine tops
he will run

CAST DO A STYLISED BOW AND EXIT THE STAGE FORMALLY IN SINGLE FILE



