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Technical Direction of Frankenstein 1930

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TECHNICAL DIRECTION OF

FRANKENSTEIN 1930

by

ISAAC SAWLE

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
MASTER OF FINE ARTS
IN
THEATRE ARTS

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This thesis has been examined and approved.

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This document is a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the Master of Fine Arts degree in theatre. It is a detailed account of author Isaac Sawle’s technical direction process for Minnesota State University, Mankato’s production of *Frankenstein 1930* in the fall of 2016. This thesis chronicles the author’s process from pre-production through post-production in five chapters: an early production analysis, a historical and critical perspective, a process journal, a post-production analysis and a process development analysis. Appendices and works cited are included.
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CHAPTER I

EARLY PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

This chapter contains the early production analysis for the technical direction of 
*Frankenstein 1930*. The script was written by Fred Carmichael, and is an adaptation of 
Mary Shelly’s classic novel *Frankenstein*. *Frankenstein 1930* (shortened to *Frankenstein* 
unless clarification is necessary) will be directed by Heather Hamilton, with scenic 
design by Erin Wegleitner, lighting design by Steven Smith, sound design by George 
Grubb and costume design by Emily Kimball. The production will run October 6–9 and 
13–16, 2016 in the Andreas Theatre at Minnesota State University, Mankato.

In the first production meeting Hamilton presented many ideas about the script. 
She discussed Mary Shelley’s life at the time of writing the novel. Shelley suffered the 
loss of several children at birth or shortly after. Her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, also 
died after giving birth to her. Knowing this, it is easy to understand why a theme 
Hamilton identified in *Frankenstein* is the idea of creating life yet circumventing birth. 
The show has been cast and every character will be played by a woman. This could give 
the audience a new perspective on this story of a man creating life. Hamilton also 
talked of Faustian and Promethean ideas of secret or forbidden knowledge. These 
concepts could definitely be found to apply to the story of *Frankenstein*. At this point
Hamilton sees a number of possibilities, and seems to want to explore them in rehearsal. This will no doubt be a conceptually fluid process.

In terms of design Hamilton has given the production team a lot of room to interpret ideas. The play’s setting is near Vienna in the early 1930s. Hamilton says she does want to suggest 1930 with some of the design elements, but she also made clear that nothing needs to pass as being real or true to life. Hamilton wants the show to feature women’s bodies and the uses they are subjected to. Originally this was going to be partially executed by the cast. The women were going to form the furniture of the show using their own bodies. This part of Hamilton’s concept has morphed in the rehearsal process, but the idea retains its importance.

When discussing the set Hamilton asked for a platform that is tall enough to allow for action underneath it. The script, like many other adaptations, sets Victor’s laboratory in an old mill atop a hill. Hamilton wants the cast’s references to this lab to have a distinct, elevated area the audience can associate with them. Initially the desire was for the set to be so minimal that it only featured the platform. However, the show has evolved in rehearsal and the stage will no longer be nearly empty. Examples of things needed on stage are a small amount of furniture, a few floor lamps and a lab table where the Creature is assembled. The Creature itself will be a puppet controlled by three actors. At this point it seems that the scene shop will not be responsible for the puppet’s construction but this student anticipates assisting in this process in some way.
There is one effect that the shop is going to be responsible for producing. Hamilton has requested dry ice fog. Dry ice is a solid form of carbon dioxide that exists at much lower temperatures than conventional ice. With a temperature of -109.3 degrees Fahrenheit, dry ice will begin to sublimate (change directly from a solid to a gas) as soon as it is exposed to air. This effect is noticeable even at room temperature. When immersed in heated water, that rate of sublimation drastically increases. This is the basic premise behind dry ice foggers. These machines heat water and allow an operator to control that water’s interaction with the ice. The result is a very dense pool of low-lying fog that can be generated at specific moments. This fog has a natural tendency to fall to the lowest point in a space and linger there until it dissipates into the room. Adding it to the laboratory could create a striking visual as it cascades down from the platform.

At this point it seems fitting to discuss the theatre space. The Andreas Theatre has movable seating, meaning that the configuration of the room can be changed to give students experience in different types of spaces. The configuration used for this production will be ‘in the round,’ sometimes known as ‘arena staging.’ This style features an audience on all four sides of the acting space, which is centered in the room (see Appendix A). This arrangement offers the possibility of intimate and unique performances. With the closest seats being only thirteen feet from the center of the playing space, the audience is very close to the action. There are a number of potential challenges to working in this layout. The proximity of the audience means that any set
pieces will be more closely scrutinized by an audience member. Inconsistencies in the design, construction or paint treatment have the potential to stick out and be far more distracting than in a typical, proscenium style, theatre. The sightlines of the audience members can also be a major hurdle. Any set piece placed in the acting space will be seen from all sides. If the scenery is too tall or otherwise opaque it could block the view of the action from certain seats. That issue can be mitigated by designing with this factor in mind, and by checking sightlines with specific drafting. This technical director has worked to provide Wegleitner with any help she requests in checking for sightline issues.

It has taken several weeks longer than anticipated to reach the final iteration of this design. The platform has changed location, shape and size since the first ideas were presented. What the group seems to have agreed on is that the platform will be approximately 7’ x 11’ and will be centered in the space. (See appendix for ground plan and images of elements described below.) Wegleitner has expressed her desire for the platform structure to be as low profile as possible. The sketches thus far show four support structures as being the sole points of contact with the ground, leaving the platform completely open underneath. This document will refer to these support structures as ladders from this point forward. The ladders are composed of two vertical legs made from two-inch, round 40 steel pipe, with smaller steel rungs welded horizontally. The tall, open space beneath the structure is designed to serve as a playing space. This has been a point of discussion in many of the production meetings.
Smith cannot illuminate that acting space from the standard lighting positions above the platform. Potential solutions discussed include installing lights on the underside of the platform, the actors bringing lights onstage for certain scenes and the use of a period chandelier to hang from the platform frame. The current plan includes the use of floor lights brought on for certain scenes, and plugged into power sources on the set.

Wegleitner’s desire for a minimally framed, inconspicuous structure leads this technical director to think that the platform frame should be constructed out of steel. In this student’s experience the most effective way to create structures such as this is to build steel truss. In brief, a truss is a structure comprised of several different pieces of material, in this case steel, that are arranged in a way that they create a frame that is stronger and more resilient than its individual pieces. The trusses that will be used to realize this design will be constructed out of rectangular steel tubing welded together. The designer has expressed her desire that the trusses be small enough to not be a focal point of the structure. After discussing options with Wegleitner it was decided that the best option would be a six-inch truss frame. Perpendicular to the frame will be a top deck of 2x8 boards. Though this may sound similar to standard deck boards, their exaggerated size will give the platform a theatrical, larger than life aspect.

This structure comprises the majority of the responsibility of the shop at this point. Executing it will be a challenge due to the timeline and the small number of experienced welders in the shop. As the show and the design have evolved, the time left to build it has dwindled. This is not a new challenge but to this technical director it
feels more pressing than in past productions. Completing the show in time will require quick thought and action from both the technical director and designer. It is sometimes difficult to get a confident answer when discussing the design with Wegleitner, and at this point it is necessary to commit to the design and make choices. This technical director will strive to communicate clearly with the designer, and press for well-defined answers to his questions.

The second challenge as noted above is the lack of experienced welders in the shop’s labor pool. A structure such as this requires that the welds be of high quality, and learning to do that cannot be rushed. As this is an academic institution one of the goals of the shop is to teach students new skills. This is an opportunity to do that. However, introducing a student to welding by asking them to weld a load bearing structure is also somewhat impractical. In an ideal situation the technical director or other skilled staff would take the time to teach the necessary skills to a group of students and then ask them to fabricate the structure after they have become somewhat proficient. In the interest of time this student anticipates finding a middle ground of teaching some students to weld and pairing them with more experienced welders as we assemble the platform structure.

There is a factor not yet covered that should aid Sawle in the technical direction process for *Frankenstein*. For the first time in his experience at Minnesota State University, Mankato, this technical director has an assistant. Sean Burk, a second year BFA candidate, will serve as the assistant technical director. Burk is an intelligent young
man who seems eager to work with and learn from Sawle. Burk has worked with Sawle before, but not in this capacity. He has experience in building scenery, and is a paid member of the scene shop staff. Sawle hopes to involve Burk in as much of the process as is practical. It is the goal of this technical director that Burk learns from this experience, both by Sawle’s example and by leading others on his own. To that end Sawle plans to take advantage of the chance to delegate tasks and the supervision of labor to Burk. This will allow Sawle to attempt to stay ahead of problems that may arise, and also free him up to purchase material or supervise more intricate processes. Sawle anticipates that both he and Burk will benefit from this opportunity.

This build process will need to progress rapidly. As explained above the scale of the project is not overly large, but the designs have come in several weeks late. Realizing these designs will require skills and materials the shop does not have in abundance. The skills can be taught, but the material will need to be purchased. Out of a total budget of $1500.00 the largest anticipated material cost will be steel. Sawle has selected local steel supplier Minnesota Iron and Metal as his vendor for the steel needed on this project. He anticipates buying nine sticks of 1”x2” rectangular steel. This steel comes in 24’ lengths. He also anticipates purchasing four steel pipes to construct the ladders of the platform. This steel is sold in lengths of 21’. As this is a small amount relative to what a steelyard will typically sell, they will not deliver it. Sawle will need to have it cut into manageable lengths and pick it up himself. A quick estimation of steel cost has come in at approximately $350.00 with cutting fees
included. Sawle will budget an even $400.00 to allow for any additional costs. The 2x8 lumber will be another substantial cost. Sawle will be purchasing this lumber from the local Menards. Initial estimates put the cost around $110.00.

The cost of the necessary hardware is currently less certain. From a total budget of $1500.00 Sawle would typically set aside $150.00 to $200.00, and that seems prudent in this case. Sawle has talked with Wegleitner about her desired style of hardware, specifically fasteners, and she wants a nondescript, non-modern aesthetic. There are a few options that Sawle has in mind. The most obvious choice is using carriage bolts, a type of bolt that has a rounded head. While it would be an easy choice based on availability, it would also be extremely time consuming to install them. Sawle has looked around at standard construction suppliers like Menards with little success in finding an alternative. A trip to Fastenal, a more specialized hardware source, in the near future will settle this matter.

The potential cost of dry ice is the last major expense to account for. This effect will require some testing be done to find the best method of achieving it. Burk and Sawle have discussed a plan to purchase a small amount and, using containers selected by Wegleitner, test the amounts of fog that can be successfully produced. Sawle’s prior experience with dry ice has included work with devices fashioned from large barrels that produce massive amounts of fog. He has also worked on smaller, more practical effects but they were achieved in a theatre that is not nearly the size of the Andreas. Dry ice can now be purchased in several locations around Mankato but only one source
sells it on the weekends, a local HyVee grocery store. HyVee sells dry ice for $1.49 a pound. Since it is unknown how much will be needed to create the desired effect it is not realistic to predict the cost at this point. However, based on the above estimates, Sawle will have around half of his budget remaining after the steel, lumber and hardware are purchased. This should leave sufficient room for the fog effect.

The set for *Frankenstein* is going to need to come together quickly. Final designs have been late to arrive and the lack of necessary materials in stock will mean a slow start to the process. The design does not feature many different set pieces, and the shop’s main focus will be the large platform in the center of the room. However, due to the proximity of the audience and the height of the unit, it will need to be made with careful attention to detail. Welding is a major part of the process of the build, and teaching this skill will require a large time commitment. Having an assistant technical director will allow Sawle the opportunity to step away from certain minutia of running the build, but will also require that he consider Burk’s educational experience when making decisions or delegating tasks. This process will be challenging, but Sawle hopes to realize the design and serve the show in a manner that is both practical and helpful to the production team.
CHAPTER II

HISTORICAL AND CRITICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Victor Frankenstein found in Mary Shelley’s novel never pulled a lever to harness the power of lightning. He never exclaimed any variation of “it lives!” He did not have an assistant, and his story does not end with a climactic clash where he and his creation attempt to destroy each other. Yet these are some of the most common popular conceptions of the story of Frankenstein. How did Mary Shelley’s novel, first published in 1818, become associated with these ideas? The answer is that it was adapted for the stage, and eventually film. The translation of any book to a visual medium necessitates change, but in Frankenstein we find a remarkable divergence from the source material. That split was first manifested in Richard Brinsley Peake’s 1823 melodrama Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein. This play would set a low bar for the adaptations that followed in terms of tone and accuracy. The trend of Frankenstein adaptations can be followed through the early 20th century when, after a period of absence, the advent of the motion picture would help to place Frankenstein firmly back in the public’s eye.

But what has been lost through these adaptations? Just as importantly, how did the theatre contribute to the distortion of the original work? This chapter will attempt to answer both of these questions. It will first compare popular conceptions of Victor
Frankenstein and his creature with their counterparts in the original text. Following this it will explain the connections between two important adaptations of Frankenstein: the aforementioned Presumption and the 1931 Universal film “Frankenstein” directed by James Whale and starring Boris Karloff. The chapter will follow the path from one to the other, discussing several other important adaptations along the way.

To an audience member unfamiliar with Shelley’s novel, the characters and situations found in Frankenstein 1930 likely resemble those that they would expect. But after reading the book they would note many significant differences. It is obvious that the script takes many cues from previous adaptations of Frankenstein, particularly Universal’s 1931 film, but these adaptations have generally strayed so far from their source that they are scarcely telling Shelley’s story at all. It is important, therefore, to identify what has been lost as Frankenstein has moved off the page. This can best be established by highlighting the changes to Victor Frankenstein and the Creature, and the impact those changes had on the meaning of Shelley’s work.

An average audience member may be most familiar with Boris Karloff’s iconic portrayal of the Creature. To this day many of the mass-market depictions of the Creature take some cue from his stiff, groaning performance. His parallel in the novel is quite the opposite. Though it is grotesque, Shelley’s Creature is both powerful and intelligent. While it is definitely a monster in many regards, it also exhibits a great amount of humanity. After existing entirely alone, scavenging to survive, and after
teaching itself to speak, write and read (Milton, no less) the Creature displays an eloquent understanding of exactly how alone it is:

Accursed creator! Why did you form a monster so hideous that even you turned from me in disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow-devils, to admire and encourage him; but I am solitary and abhorred. (Shelley 130)

During this segment of the novel the Creature recounts his life since his animation. It has been one of fear, isolation and violence. Regardless of his usually benign intentions, the Creature has been universally mistreated because of what it appears to be. It reaches out for acceptance and companionship and is constantly, often violently, scorned. Rejected even by his creator, he exists alone. The depth of his solitude is displayed after Victor dies. The Creature, now knowing it will remain isolated forever, makes plans to end its own life quietly in the remote Arctic tundra. This is not the creature seen in most renditions of Frankenstein. In the majority of cases, as described by Professor Albert J. Lavalle:

The Monster is usually mute or semiarticulate, lacking the ‘powers of eloquence and persuasion’ that, in the novel, defy or compensate for his hideousness. In the film or on stage that hideousness tends to dominate. (244)
Without the ability to speak the Creature becomes a different kind of monster. The audience and the other characters in the play can only know it by its repulsive appearance. Lacking the ability to justify its actions or communicate desires and needs it somewhat naturally becomes a malevolent force, seeming to act without thought or remorse. Even attempts at a more sympathetic portrayal often make the creature resemble a speechless toddler: moody and sometimes unaware of its own size and ability. While a creature of this type may certainly elicit pity from an audience, it is much more difficult to empathize with than Shelley’s well-spoken original. Without that empathy, the Creature appears as little more than a grotesque monster.

The Victor Frankenstein portrayed on stage is also quite different from the character in the book. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, Victor worked alone. He had no assistant, no inquisitive family snooping about a massive lab, no devices to harness the power of lightning and no longtime friend or mentor stepping in to join him at the last moment. In the novel, Victor’s laboratory was his apartment in Ingolstadt, the Bavarian city where he attended university. His methods are not those of high electrical and biological sciences. He seems to use chemistry and alchemy as his source of animation, but the processes used to deliver life are ultimately never identified in the novel.

Shelley’s ambiguous description of Victor’s success takes less than a paragraph, with “I collected the instruments of life around me” serving as the only clue to how the “spark of being” (Shelley 57) was delivered. Further, at the moment of animation the
reader does not find a headstrong man obsessed with the success of his experiment. They instead find a mind heavy with the weight of its work, and a young man who is aware of the toll his dedication has taken:

    My enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines . . . Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Sometimes I grew alarmed at the wreck I perceived that I had become. (Shelley 56)

As the reader can see, this is quite distant from the melodrama often played on stage or screen. The Victor of the novel is a wounded, lonely young man who, wracked with guilt and still mourning his mother, attempts to discern the secret of life. In the end he meets his demise pursuing his creation, perishing in a frail state before he can locate and destroy the Creature. This Victor is not the one most audiences are familiar with. Steven Earl Forry, author of *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present*, points to the early adaptations, like Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, as a cause. “The novel’s lack of diametrically opposed characters presents obvious difficulties for the [dualistic] world of melodrama, for how could a melodrama portray the triumph of virtue when the supposed hero perishes with the supposed villain?” (Forry 21). In order to fit the dramatic conventions of the time, the characters were made to conform to more
standard types. The Victor Frankenstein that is familiar to many audiences is often portrayed as a mad scientist driven by a selfish passion. He wants to make a statement, to prove his critics wrong or, in some cases, simply to play God. This version of Victor typically regrets his folly in time to either defeat the Creature or die trying, and redeem himself in the attempt.

Yet again the audience finds one of the main characters of the novel has been radically altered for the sake of fitting a more easily recognizable type. The Creature was made more villainous while Victor was typically made more heroic. The shifting of these two characters to polar ends of the moral spectrum then also changes the message behind the work. As Victor and the Creature become more archetypical, the story is naturally altered to better suit the conflict between these types. Lavalley calls this a “moralistic compromise” and points out that in Universal’s 1931 film “the doctor is injured but not killed by his creation; he is punished for his *hubris* and he willingly singles himself out to confront the monster in the burning windmill. Risking death, he finds life” (264). One man’s redemption by overcoming a literal personification of his hubris was not the theme of Shelley’s work. While in the novel Victor does pursue his creature to the ends of the earth in order to stop it, the spectacular clash of moral opposites often seen on stage or screen inaccurately represents the complex relationship between these two. If an audience cannot see the humanity in the Creature, then they cannot understand the pain it feels when it is spurned by every person it encounters. If they do not see Victor as an isolated man trapped between
obligation to, and fear of, his creation, they cannot recognize the depth of his torment as he attempts to come to grips with what he has done. These are the characters found in Shelley’s novel. But, after nearly two centuries of stage and film adaptations, they are also very different from the characters that exist as the public face of Frankenstein.

It has been established that Mary Shelley’s novel has been altered to a large extent as it was presented in different media. But the reasons for those changes must also be examined. In an era where screen adaptations of novels are often criticized for their accuracy, this student found it interesting that, in this case, theatre was responsible for steering Frankenstein in a new direction.

Early dramatizations of Frankenstein were typically written in the melodramatic style that was popular at the time, and once the trend began, it took off quickly. The first staged adaptation of Frankenstein was Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein which opened in London on July 28, 1823. It would be presented 37 times in its first season, running until October. The play turned out to be extremely popular and Steven Earl Forry notes that “Presumption still held the stage throughout the 1820s and into the 1830s” and that the play had performances as late as 1843 (11). The success of Presumption inspired a large number of other adaptations. By 1826 it was one of at least 15 similar productions that were on stage in England and France. Despite the somber tone of the source material these adaptations were, as characterized by Mary Shelley biographer Miranda Seymour, ‘usually farcical, never serious’ (Seymour 335).
While it was well liked in its time, *Presumption* is also seen by many as the first step in the popular misconception of the story and themes of *Frankenstein*. Ralph Willingham, a scholar in the field of science fiction and theatre, goes so far as to claim that “it was the theatre’s treatment of Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein* (1818) that set the low standards that have prevailed in science fiction drama to this day” (Willingham 14). Anyone familiar with the novel will notice a great many liberties have been taken with its text. *Presumption*’s playwright, Richard Brinsley Peake, in an effort to force the play to conform to melodramatic conventions, deviated from Shelley’s novel a great deal. He compressed the span of the novel to a 24-hour period in his three-act production that lasted approximately an hour (Willingham 14). The character Walton, and his voyage of northern exploration (narrative devices Shelley used to frame her novel), are missing from the story entirely. Fritz, the first assistant to Victor, is a character created out of thin air. These alterations are significant, and most of them endured and evolved in future productions, but the most significant changes in this case were made to Victor and the Creature.

In *Presumption* (and most of the adaptations that followed it) the novel’s intricate relationship between a creator and his creation is condensed to the most basic levels of horror and hatred. The Creature itself is reduced from an articulate, even sympathetic character to a speechless purveyor of mayhem and evil. Theatre scholar Jeanne Tiehen, describes the early treatment of the Creature:
In both Peake’s play and Henry M. Milner’s popular 1826 play, *Frankenstein; or, The Man and The Monster*, the Monster’s actions range from kidnapping women, chasing and outsmarting Dr. Frankenstein, and setting a cottage on fire from which characters narrowly escape. (21)

As the monster’s self-awareness and humanity are removed in favor of a caricature of a villain, Victor is also altered. He is no longer the isolated scientist trapped in his guilt. Victor now becomes a hero who, after learning the error of attempting to play God, risks his own life to stop the Creature. The early pages of this chapter explored what these types of changes mean to an audience. In *Presumption*’s case it is important to understand that the changes made amount to gutting the novel’s deep ethical and philosophical questions in favor of a dualistic morality that aligned with melodramatic conventions. In this way, the first adaptation of *Frankenstein* was setting an unfortunate precedent.

*Presumption* may have been the first staged version of *Frankenstein* and by default the best known in its time. But it was soon joined by numerous other dramatizations that would continue to take liberties with the novel. In 1826 playwright Henry Milner wrote an adaptation of *Frankenstein*, titling it *The Man and the Monster*. It became “the only serious long term rival of *Presumption*” (Forry 13). This play, another melodrama, takes the story further from its inspiration by setting the action in the Mediterranean with a climax in the active volcanic crater of Mount Etna. The play
takes even less heed of its source material than *Presumption* but as Jeanne Tiehen explains, it made an important addition to the action:

> The relationship between the Monster and Frankenstein in the 1820s dramatizations often began in a creation scene hidden off stage, only depicted through changing colored lights. It was not until Milner’s 1826 adaptation that the creation scene was first shown on stage (Tiehen 22).

When Mary Shelley wrote *Frankenstein* she included no remarkable moment of creation. In her text the Creature is quietly and ambiguously brought to life in a dark apartment. Milner, in his most important contribution to the *Frankenstein* mythos, introduced a completely new element by showing the audience the moment and means of creation. As written, the scene would likely underwhelm modern audiences who are accustomed to a major spectacle as the Creature is reanimated. The laboratory was, according to Forry, “cluttered ‘with Bottles, and Chemical Apparatus—and a brazier with fire’” (17). The creation scene in this instance did not have elaborate machinery, or any reference to the power of lightning or electricity. These additions would be made 90 years later, early in the twentieth century.

Dramatic adaptations of *Frankenstein* would stay in vogue for decades before the trend began to fade, holding out as late as 1888, when *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* ended its run in London. This final *Frankenstein* based play of the century was written by Henry Chance Newton and Richard Butler. Though the play is notable for starring Nellie Farren as Frankenstein (the first recorded instance of a
woman playing the part), it is equally infamous for the other liberties it took with the
story. “In fact, so removed is *Vampire’s Victim* from Shelley’s story that the reader has
the impression that neither of its two playwrights ever read the novel” (Forry 63). As
one can infer from the title, the play features multiple vampires. It also includes a
golem-like character called the Model, a monster animated as a prototype for the
Creature. This small menagerie of horrific creations seems to have been used to
primarily comic effect, further removing this play from its source. *The Vampire’s Victim*
would prove to be the last dramatic adaptation for several decades. It was during this
period of absence from the stage that motion pictures came into being. When
*Frankenstein* finally returned to the public eye it would exist both on stage and in this
new medium, where it would again steer away from Mary Shelley’s novel.

If one imagines Victor Frankenstein or his creation, they likely call to mind at
least one depiction related to Universal Pictures’ 1931 film “Frankenstein.” Directed by
James Whale and starring Boris Karloff as the Creature, the film created many of the
enduring images now associated with, and reused by, the plays and movies that
followed. But these now common motifs did not simply spring out of the minds of the
filmmakers:

> When Universal pictures produced the cult film “Frankenstein” . . . it was
> not the novel, but the plays, that influenced the film script. Thus the
> theatre was responsible for perpetuating the misconceptions that
> continue to surround [*Frankenstein*]. (Willingham 15)
Willingham’s point rings true. If the public was most familiar with the dramatic variants of *Frankenstein*, it should not be a surprise that the film took many cues from these works. The genesis of this landmark film lies in Peggy Webling’s 1927 play *Frankenstein: An Adventure in the Macabre*. The play had been successful in England as a companion to *Dracula* by Hamilton Deane. Its success led to plans for an American rendition, with playwright John Balderston hired to adapt the script. However, before that play could be produced, Universal purchased the rights to it. These rights included both Webling’s original script and Balderston’s revision. Their ideas were incorporated (with substantial modification by Whale and others) into the film.

The resulting picture was commercially and critically successful, making twelve million dollars and winning acclaim from the *New York Times* (*O’Flinn* 204). While it was both popular and lucrative, the film took the same liberties with the original text that were common to stage productions, e.g. the oversimplification of the relationship between a creator and his creation, the lab assistant, adding a creation scene and the re-naming or removal of characters. The Creature itself is rescued from the comic novelty it had been reduced to in many plays. However, Karloff’s portrayal, though perhaps sympathetic in moments, remains worlds apart from Shelley’s articulate, contemplative Creature. Karloff’s iconic performance, along with the spectacular creation scene and climax, resulted in images that have been lodged in the public psyche ever since. As this chapter has attempted to show, the legacy of this film is in keeping with the dramatizations that preceded it. It perpetuated inaccuracies found in
previous works while adding its own spin to many of them, establishing several norms that exist to this day. *Frankenstein 1930* is an example of the continuation of this process. The script, though it is a relatively recent adaptation, resembles Universal’s film much more so than it does the novel. Based on nearly two centuries of dramatic variations, it contains the same familiar locales, scenarios and characters that an average audience would expect to find. Its distance from the novel is quite noticeable when the two are directly compared, but it fits very well into the trend of drawing primary influence from the productions that preceded it. In this way, theatre is indeed partially responsible for the misconception of Shelley’s novel.

*Frankenstein’s* relationship with drama is a complicated one. It seems that theatrical adaptations sustained interest in, and simultaneously distorted, the Frankenstein mythos. The departures from the original novel began with the melodrama *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. Following *Presumption’s* lead, new productions changed existing story elements and added many things not found in Shelley’s text. This process would continue to, and beyond, Universal’s massive hit “Frankenstein,” a film whose origins lie in the stage adaptations that preceded it. “Frankenstein” would set visual and thematic standards that persist even on the modern stage and screen. These changes pulled the story further away from its inspiration by reducing Victor and the Creature to mere shades of their namesakes. This has culminated in a public misconception of key aspects of the novel. Shelley’s carefully crafted tale now seems buried underneath the weight of the liberties and
clichés that many of its adaptations are built on. Without a brutish Creature, a mad scientist and a lightning fueled creation scene, Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein may be hard for some to recognize.
Today was the first production meeting for *Frankenstein*. The director, Heather Hamilton, used the meeting to convey her early ideas. The production team is large and includes several people I have not had the opportunity to work with. Other faculty members on the team include George Grubb as the sound designer and Steve Smith as the lighting designer. The rest of the team members are students. It includes Erin Wegleitner as the scenic designer, Sean Burk as the assistant technical director, Emily Kimball as the costume designer, Jayme Beerling as stage manager and Alex Blesi as the dramaturg.

Hamilton’s early thoughts on the design of the show are still very abstract. She explained that Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s life was surrounded by death. Shelley’s mother died shortly after giving birth, and Shelley herself lost three children. Hamilton described *Frankenstein* as partly a story of creating life yet skipping birth. Two other thoughts she raised include the “Promethean” and “Faustian” concepts of forbidden knowledge. In terms of the scenic design, the strongest guidance she offered is her desire for an elevated platform of some sort.
9/1/16

Today’s production meeting was used to refine concepts and answer questions. Wegleitner presented some sketches that included several styles of platform and a somewhat rustic, minimally supported spiral staircase. Hamilton ruled out the staircase, but very much connected with an idea for a platform that has a dilapidated look and feel. Suspending the platform on wire or chain was proposed, and Hamilton asked Smith and me for our thoughts on it. We had similar reservations about the idea, and discussed ways to achieve a similar effect without actually hanging the platform from the steel grid in the ceiling. I made it clear that if we wanted to pursue the idea I would be happy to work with it, but that there may be differing ways to get what we want.

Hamilton seemed to be under the impression that, if anchored to the floor, the platform would need to rest on stud walls. This is not necessarily true, and I posed alternatives such as the platform resting on legs or posts that are designed to look precarious. This idea appealed to Hamilton and to Wegleitner, and the general consensus was that we should explore this idea. I plan to show Wegleitner a few steel truss sections that exist in our stock. Utilizing them as common points of reference may help to put Wegleitner and I on the same page as she moves forward with her design.
The production meeting opened with Hamilton explaining that the original concept has evolved. As the ensemble has rehearsed the show a new central idea has become “the misappropriation of women’s bodies.” Hamilton is using the women on stage to form everything except for the platform. The cast is onstage the entire time. When they are not a character in a scene they are acting as the furniture, set dressing and providing some sound effects. I am curious to see this concept in execution.

The group saw updated sketches from Wegleitner. Her drawings showed a platform located center stage. It was approximately 11’ x 7’ at a height of 6’-6”. Hamilton responded positively, but asked if the supports could be smaller, moved to the corners and still climbable. Putting a leg in each corner is something I’m very firmly in favor of. I interjected at one point to remind the group that a platform of that size will likely need a large, very noticeable frame. Towards the end of the meeting I attempted to learn more about Wegleitner’s ideas for the platform’s structure. I explained that there were many ways to build it, and that I could attempt to minimize the visible framing, or even build a structure with framing that is visually interesting if that was desired. My request for more information ended up drawing the group into a conversation about the size and height of the platform. Grubb brought up sight line issues that Wegleitner and Hamilton hadn’t considered. More work on this is necessary, and Hamilton asked that we figure this out before next week. Wegleitner
and I have made plans to meet in the morning to explore the issue in the space. I plan to bring a few visual aids that we can adjust to varying heights. Hopefully we can get this sorted out quickly. The lack of a finished design is beginning to worry me.

9/9/16

Wegleitner and I met this morning and examined sight lines in the Andreas. My goal was to get her any information she needed so that she could refine her ideas. We temporarily put up a few pieces of lumber to give her an idea of what you could see from various seats. She also asked me about the viability of a new design for the legs under the platform. I’m hoping these new ideas are something Hamilton responds to. Wegleitner tells me she will leave a sketch or two on my desk tonight. So I plan to examine those this weekend.

9/10/16

Wegleitner did leave sketches for me to evaluate. The platform is the same size and location, with some slight modifications to the shape and support structure. I was looking over the drawings when I received an email from Hamilton with some surprising news. There are major changes afoot. The physicality of Hamilton’s concept isn’t working out, and she has asked for several changes. We are now using furniture. There is now a need for a lab table on top of the platform. It is possible that the Creature could be stored inside of it during Act 1. But there is also the possibility that the lab
table negatively affects sightlines. In the last meeting Grubb suggested that section views (a specific form of drafting) may be necessary to really sort out the sightline issues. I suggested that to Wegleitner again while we discussed Hamilton’s new ideas. Smith has already replied to Hamilton’s email, and asked if this changes the size or location of the platform. Hopefully the group can make some decisions over the weekend.

9/12/16

I attended the rehearsal tonight. I wanted to see a run-through of the show so that I have a feel for how they are using the space. That way I can at least intelligently discuss the use of whatever the design turns out to be. I didn’t glean a whole lot of new information, but what I did learn is helpful. In rehearsal they were operating under the assumption that the platform is still 11’x7’ and Hamilton confirmed that is still the general plan. I saw the way the action atop the platform is blocked, and discussed safety with Hamilton. She assured me that the cast is well aware of the height and size of the platform. The action occurring on the platform leads me to believe we will need more bracing than I saw in the initial sketches. Wegleitner and I will need to figure that out, but she hasn’t told me about her thoughts following the events of last weekend. Hamilton mentioned that she and Wegleitner had met to discuss the set. With any luck this means that there will be some real design drafting available to me soon. I am officially concerned with the lack of progress and I made that clear. Hamilton asked me
how far behind the design was according to the production calendar. I didn’t know exactly how many days, but I knew it was around two weeks. I plan to have that calendar with me at the meeting on Thursday.

9/15/16

Before today’s meeting started Hamilton and I looked at the department production calendar. We are indeed several weeks behind, and during the meeting Hamilton acknowledged as much. The set design was due on August 29, and it’s still not in. Hamilton made it very clear that the delays stem from her sabbatical and the changes to the concept, but laid out a firm Monday deadline for Wegleitner to have a finished package of design drawings.

Discussion of the set took up a majority of the meeting. Wegleitner showed updated pencil sketches of a painted floor and two new sketches of the platform. The newest revision of the platform shows that it has increased in height, with seven feet of open space underneath. The idea of hanging some kind of decorative lamp under the platform was posed, but it morphed to the idea of movable floor lamps that could be used in appropriate scenes.

The thickness of the platform structure came up. Wegleitner now wants the platform framing to be as thin as possible. This isn’t something she had communicated before and would make it difficult for Smith to successfully hide lighting instruments. I asked, and Wegleitner maintained her desire for a steel frame, or something that looks
like one. I’m hoping that her final drafting indicates a style, be it truss or straight beams. I brought up a lack of bracing indicated in the sketches. I explained that we would need some amount of bracing to keep the platform from swaying too much. I feel that we could use a light touch at first. Assuming we go with a steel frame, additional bracing will not be difficult to add.

A new development is the addition of dry ice fog in the lab. I agree that fog rolling off a high platform could be a very cool effect. However, any dry ice fog used in the play is also my responsibility. At this point I was asked for fog in each lab scene through the first act. Hamilton asked for some sort of method to start and stop the effect. I didn’t promise anything, but we have the room in the budget if I can figure out how to make it happen. I will need to play with ways to execute this idea. After this weekend’s strike of Comic Potential I will have access to the space, so this experiment will need to wait a bit.

9/19/16

The set design came in overnight. We’re behind, but I think we’ll be able to execute this fairly efficiently. Wegleitner did her drafting in the theatre building over the weekend. I was around the office most of that time so she and I talked a bit as she was finalizing her ideas. I wish I’d seen them earlier, as there were several technical problems with the drafting. The final design isn’t radically different from what we have
been talking about for the last few weeks, so I had a fairly good idea of how I wanted to approach it.

The platform will be framed with steel truss and the top will be planked with 2x8 boards. The legs that this platform rests on resemble scaffolding in some ways. Wegleitner has indicated she wants them to look as if they are held together with cheeseboroughs, a specific style of pipe coupler. At first glance it seems we will have to develop a facsimile as the diameters of pipe she has specified are not typically used together. But I will continue to look for real versions of the proper hardware as I begin to buy the supplies I need.

Identifying what the shop has in stock is the next priority. I’d like to have my materials ordered by the middle of the week. I had Burk look through our steel and lumber stock today. He inventoried the things useful to us and gave me a list. That will be the first thing I look at tomorrow morning.

9/21/16

Frankenstein really kicked into gear today. I spoke with Grubb in the morning and we determined that the best way to work on Frankenstein would be to move everything I may need up to the Andreas. We brought a few platforms to make temporary tables, as well as a welder and a saw. I had a good crew and they worked faster than I anticipated, which allowed us time to work on Frankenstein and also to put several large pieces of furniture back into storage.
After clearing and preparing the space we began to cut jig blocks. For the purposes of welding, a jig is a form of template that allows the desired shape or structure to be laid out prior to making the welds. It holds the material in place as it is welded, making the process uniform and preventing the steel from deforming as it is exposed to the extreme heat of welding. When carefully constructed, jigs also allow for the exact duplication of a process. Since each truss used in the platform will need to be duplicated one or more times, the jigs we construct need to be carefully laid out.

9/22/16

The production meeting added a few things to my plate. There is now a desire to add dry ice fog to the stage floor during the first scene. This shouldn’t be terribly difficult, but it does add to the amount of dry ice we will need to purchase. It also means we will need an additional delivery system. I asked Burk to follow up on the information Smith gave us about purchasing dry ice. He has been in contact with the grocery department at a local Hy-Vee supermarket, and I expect to hear that information tomorrow. He and I have planned to meet on Saturday to do some rough testing of how much dry ice we will need to produce various levels of fog.

In the meeting I brought up my thoughts regarding Wegleitner’s design note “Handles Where Needed.” I think we will need at least one of these handles on each of the four ladders, but at this point it looks like we are going to start with adding them to
two of the ladders. I’ll need to talk with Wegleitner about the height she wants them at.

After the production meeting Burk and I went to Minnesota Iron and Metal, a local steel supplier, to place an order. Overall I was very disappointed with them today. They didn’t have enough 1”x2” steel tubing to fill my fairly small order, and they were slow to fill the reduced order I could place. They also gave me the wrong steel pipe. This meant I had to make another trip downtown halfway through the afternoon and get things straightened out. Thankfully Burk was around to keep things moving. I had him supervising several people as they cut jig blocks, degreased the new steel and continued cutting steel pieces needed for the truss. Minnesota Iron and Metal tells me they will have the rest of the steel I need tomorrow morning.

9/24/16

Burk and I went shopping this morning. We picked up a cooler and some dry ice. Our goal was to test the current plan to generate fog by dropping dry ice into hidden buckets of hot water under the lab table. The tests did not turn out the way we had hoped. In order to create the proper amount of fog we needed to use about ten pounds of dry ice, but the effect was short lived. The ice cooled the water in the bucket so rapidly that the dry ice became encased in frozen water. We will need to come up with a new solution fairly quickly. Custom building a device for the effect is the last
thing I have time for. I have to work in the Twin Cities tomorrow, so I will see if any of my contacts up there can offer any help.

9/26/16

This was a productive day. I spent lot of the morning preparing for the afternoon in the shop. This included fine-tuning some shop drawings of the truss jigs. Jigs like this are difficult to draft in a way that doesn’t become too crowded and difficult to read. The solution I came up with isn’t perfect, but it got the job done (examples in appendix). The jigs came together really well. This is in large part due to the careful work last week. I was very clear that I wanted people to take the time to cut the steel and jig blocks exactly, and it seems that they did.

After assembling the jigs I took the time to teach the basics of welding to the three students working with me. It was important that I take time today with people who weren’t experienced welders. I taught Burk, Blesi and Carly Kilgard how to use the jigs to lay out a truss and showed them how I want it welded. This will mean that later in the week I will have a larger amount of people capable of properly welding the trusses without constant supervision.

There have been developments regarding the fog effects. I brought back some dry ice foggers from my trip to the Twin Cities. My thought was that they would work very well for the laboratory effects. I hope to test them tomorrow and share the results with the group. Additionally Grubb got permission to purchase a dry ice fogger for the
department. This one is much larger than the small units I borrowed. I think it would be great to fog the space for the graveyard scene at the top of the show.

9/27/16

Welding continued today. Kilgard spent the afternoon welding trusses. She is quite adept for having just learned how to weld. I had Burk lead a small crew doing various tasks like a rough layout of the top deck, fixing an issue with the jigs and cutting more steel. The day was productive but things can only move so fast. The shop only has one welder that can run in the Andreas. We have two welders in our inventory, but the bigger one needs a power source larger than any that exist in the Andreas. With only one available, we’re going to need to be welding every chance we get.

After the shop shift was over I made another run to HyVee to purchase more dry ice. I was hoping to test the foggers I brought in. There were delays at HyVee so I didn’t get back to run my test until nearly 6:00pm. This turned out to be fortunate, as it means Hamilton arrived for rehearsal in time to see the final test. She was very happy with the fog, and the majority of the cast got to see it as well. I’m glad it got a positive reaction. It’s nice to have a working solution to one of our issues.

9/28/16

The progress made today was encouraging. Kilgard continued to weld, and we passed the halfway mark on the truss welding process. I had a crew lay out the 2x8
planks for the top of the platform and Wegleitner came in to draw out the shapes she wants then to be cut into. The planks were cut and ready to be sent to her by the end of the day. She should have time to distress and paint them prior to the shop needing them back. I anticipate that being Tuesday of next week.

We started laying out the jig for the ladders today. I found a solution to disguise the welded connections on the ladders. It involves notching and sliding a section of PVC tubing over the welds. This can be done at any time after the welds have cooled and been ground down. It is a fairly simple process, and we also have the PVC in stock so there is no additional cost. Other progress today included clearing space behind the seating so that the actors could use it to cross over between scenes. Everyone worked hard today and the progress was encouraging, but I am still extremely stressed about how late this set is coming together.

9/29/16

We spent a lot of time talking about the foggers in the production meeting today. Per a request from Hamilton, we are no longer locating them on top of the set but instead plan to put them on rolling bases on the stage floor. The foggers will also need to have some sort of wooden box that can be placed over them to enable them to be disguised when not in use. Moving them to the floor means I will need to pipe the fog up to the top of the platform, and find ways to run the pipe that look good and don’t create sight line issues. This would be easier if I had any sort of idea what the
final set dressing will look like. There have been no color renderings or sketches of the final look of the platform. This means that I don’t have answers to questions like “where should I route the tubing for the platform?” I will ask Wegleitner for guidance when the time comes.

The positive news out of the shop today was that Kilgard has finished welding the platform truss. This leaves only the ladders to be completed and then assembly of the frame can begin. Unfortunately we didn’t make as much progress on the ladders as I hoped. Burk and I were having some trouble with laying out the jig and when I went to re-measure the original drafting I found the cause. Wegleitner made a significant error in her drafting and I didn’t catch it until today.

When drafting, the document is always drawn in scale. This allows for large objects or structures to be communicated on manageable sizes of paper. Common scales in theatrical drafting include 1”=1'-0” and ½”=1'-0”. In this instance Wegleitner gave the team a drawing labeled as ½” but that turned out to be only partially true. Somehow she confused her scales and drew the ladder partially in 1” and partially in ½” scales. This resulted in a structure that looked one way on paper and another when the numbers were laid out in the shop.

I stopped work on the ladders until I could get opinions from Wegleitner and Hamilton. On paper the ladders look much wider than they actually are. I wanted to make sure the proper people were aware of this since we don’t have the time or steel to build them twice. In this case the caution may have paid off. Hamilton said several
of the ladders could be built as intended, but alterations may be made to one of them. So this will need to wait until I receive the notes from tonight’s rehearsal.

10/2/16

Today Burk and I worked for a few hours. The majority of it was finishing the structure of the ladders. The goal was to get things far enough along that most of the focus on Monday could be dedicated to assembling the platform and possibly lifting it into place. The more I look at it the more I wonder if the proper plan of action is to assemble a temporary scaffold around the platform and have a crew stand on that as we attempt to lift it on to the ladder structures. It is my goal to have the platform in place and walkable by the end of Tuesday. I’m nervous about that. It’s going to be close, but I believe it can be done.

10/3/16

There is a platform frame in place on stage. It’s resting on temporary supports, but it’s there. I had several crews working for the first part of the day. They built the temporary walls holding the platform up, cut and prepared more steel and fixed some problems that were found with the rolling fogger boxes. Eventually we reached the point where the only jobs that could make progress involved the welder. Luckily Grubb had some work that he could do on The Two Henrys, the next mainstage show, so the people I couldn’t use worked on that for a while. At one point I felt a little agitated with the pace of the progress we made. It wasn’t due to any one person or event, just worry
over the pressing need to get the set to a state the actors can use it in rehearsal. The process was slower than I hoped, but it does feel good to see something there.

I’ve asked Beerling for notes about how we are going to incorporate these fogger boxes. She tells me Hamilton has not yet blocked them into the show. I asked that she get me the information as soon as possible. These boxes, and the foggers they house, are major set pieces, but no one seems to know what’s going on with them. That bothers me.

10/4/16

The cast was able to use the platform tonight, but without the climbing handles in place. I was hoping to have it farther along but about halfway through the afternoon I lost Kilgard for almost an hour, which meant that the welding stopped until I could get it done myself. She was pulled away because the group working in the other shop needed a supervisor, and then when they ran out of things to do down there they came up to the Andreas. Burk and I did our best to give them jobs while keeping things moving forward. It was a stressful hour, and then, apparently, at 4:00 most of the added unskilled workers were done with their shifts for the day. Instances like this are really stressful for me, and with as busy as we were today that stress was definitely noticeable. It’s difficult to productively occupy the unskilled laborers when nine of them appear without warning.
After things quieted down a bit we made good progress. Burk led the remaining unskilled labor as they prepared more steel for me to weld. Once that was done the boards were added to the top and we very quickly had a walkable surface. At that point there was no diagonal bracing of any kind installed, and the structure had a lot of sway. Luckily Wegleitner was sticking around to work on the puppet. This meant that I could stay and work as well. I had Burk and the few remaining shop workers clean up what I didn’t need, and I got started welding some small braces between the legs and the platform. It helped quite a bit, but there needs to be more. I plan to work on it in the second half of tomorrow. We still need to add extra handles to the ladders, and weld the rest of the interior steel to them as well. Since those things directly influence how easily the cast can get up and down from the platform I want to get them taken care of as soon as I can.

10/5/16

We had to make some changes to the set today. The boards that make up the platform deck needed to be sanded. Apparently people were getting splintters in rehearsal. So I had a pair of people go over the boards with a sander several times. I’m not sure exactly where the trouble spots were, but I suspect it might be the deliberately rough areas Wegleitner wanted cut into the boards. Hopefully we can find some middle ground without too many alterations to the boards. She already distressed and
painted them, so if we do too much sanding I fear we’re going to force her to completely repaint them.

We also changed the bracing on the platform. When attempting to fit the interior pieces onto the ladders we found that they would make them very difficult to climb. I had a brief moment of concern that this would happen when we discovered that the ladders were drafted inaccurately. The impression the drafting gives doesn’t reflect the width of the realized product and the angle the steel needed to be at. I brought it to Wegleitner’s attention and we looked for ways to add different bracing. It was decided that we should add bracing that is similar to what exists, but larger. The shop installed steel tubing that connects the ladders to the platform frame at a 45-degree angle. In my opinion the added bracing is going to be enough to stabilize the platform. We will have to wait and see if the rest of the team and cast agree.

Two of the four ladders now have the extra handles on them. Originally the plan was to install them on only two ladders, but in the notes from last night it was asked that we install two of them on each ladder, making a total of eight handles. Yesterday we built four of these. But since we now need a total of eight, Burk and I went out to purchase more of the 90-degree pipe elbows needed. This turned out to be the most difficult part of the day. Burk and I spent nearly two hours and stopped in five different stores before we found them. I was surprised. I bought the first four yesterday and Menards had plenty left in the bin. Today they were completely out.
Perhaps I should have anticipated the need for extras when I was shopping yesterday but they are expensive pieces of hardware, so I only bought what was needed.

10/6/16

We are finished welding. Unless there is a problem or a major change that needs to be made I don’t anticipate any additions to the structure. The handles are all in place, and they make climbing up and down much easier. There are a lot of small things that still need to be done. We need to go over the structure again and check for any welds that need to be ground down. We also need to add the fake pipe fittings and get the space cleared and prepared for technical rehearsals. Since Burk and I aren’t in the shop tomorrow I don’t anticipate all of that being finished.

The fog effects are changing again. Grubb mentioned to Heather that the foggers wouldn’t do a great job lifting fog from the floor to the top of the platform. I agree the effect would be underwhelming but, despite asking several times, I hadn’t heard a word about the use of fog since we were asked to build the rolling fogger boxes. This morning Hamilton, Beerling and I met to discuss Hamilton’s new proposal. Hamilton now wants to place the two small fog machines back on the platform, cutting the boxes from the show. She is willing to alter the blocking and make other small changes to get the effect she wants. So tomorrow morning I need to go and buy the supplies needed to try to make this happen. Hamilton wants to be able to strike the dry ice machines at intermission. This will require that they be drained of water. I’ll need
to find a container that can hold that much liquid. The likely solution will be a trash bin of some kind. They often are made of sturdy plastic and have roller bases that fit them. I’ll also look for a siphon kit of some kind to make draining them as simple as possible.

Wegleitner wasn’t present at the meeting this morning, and that was confusing to me because this directly affects her work. This afternoon I filled her in on the discussion I had with Beerling and Hamilton, and she raised a few concerns. At the end of the day she and Hamilton came in and wanted to chat again. The three of us discussed every idea we could think of, including dropping the fog from the catwalks through pipes that would hang down to the platform. This was a fine idea, but it’s too late in the process to add something like that. That would be a huge change, and extremely unfair to Smith. There is also the problem of reloading the machines several times per act and storing the ice somewhere on stage to do that. Hamilton says she can block all of that into the show, but asking the actors to carry dry ice up those ladders in scene is not my ideal solution. So while I am out shopping I will look for an insulated container that Wegleitner can easily disguise.

The perpetually changing nature of this show is really starting to wear on me. Deadlines have been missed by weeks, design notes are sporadic and not always shared with the group and most of my attempts to get clarification are met with indecisiveness or no answer at all. It takes time for me to do good work, and it often feels like that time isn’t respected.
10/7/16

I did a lot of running around today. This morning we did some testing with the fog machines. So I was out early buying dry ice and another cooler to store it on top of the platform. After setting up the machines I showed them to Hamilton around 10:30 AM. She was pretty excited about it, so I cleaned up and went out shopping again. By the time I got back it was 1:00 PM and time to start my sound hours. In an unexpected move, Grubb gave me the afternoon to work in the shop to get things finished up. Almost the entirety of this time was spent working on setting up the foggers and properly running their power cables. The plan for the moment is to operate the two small foggers from atop the platform and to use the large fogger the department purchased as a method to fog the stage floor itself. Grubb really helped me out by giving me time to properly set these things up. Because of that the fog effects were ready to go for technical rehearsals, and I don’t know that they would have been otherwise.

Today was also the first technical rehearsal for *Frankenstein*. The run went well. The fog looked good, and the platform looked stable and easy to climb to me. There were very few stops, and I walked away with a surprisingly small list of notes. Most of them are related to the foggers. The direction and amount of fog need to be tweaked a bit for certain scenes. I also need to come up with a faster way to drain the foggers that are located on the platform, since they need to be removed at intermission. My plan to siphon the water out worked when I tested it on cool water. But in rehearsal the water
was very hot and the rubber tubing began to distort and restrict the water flow, slowing things down to an unacceptable pace. I plan to devote some time to solving this tomorrow.

Here is a brief summary of the challenge presented: The foggers are filled with six to seven gallons of very hot water and they are over seven feet in the air. They need to be drained of this water before they can be taken off the platform. If that water is spilled on a person it could seriously burn them, and dumping that much water, hot or cold, onto the stage could do major damage. I have every intention of figuring this out, but I can’t change the basic properties of the machines or the water inside them. They are built to heat water and create fog, not to be quickly moved around. If we want to use these machines atop the platform I need time to work out the best ways to do that.

Hamilton has been almost too helpful at times when it comes to the issues we face with the foggers. During rehearsal she and Smith had a lot of suggestions about methods to make things faster or easier in the use and removal of the machines. But most of them create as many problems as they solve. I understand that she and Smith are trying to be helpful, and I respect their thoughts. But I’ve only had one day to try to make this work, and these fog machines are borrowed in my name so I can’t alter or damage them.
10/8/16

I spent a majority of my day on notes related to the foggers. I bought a small plastic container and a kitchen scale so the crew could more accurately measure out the dry ice. I also purchased insulated leather gloves for ice and hot water handling, and some cheap towels to clean up any water that spills as they move foggers. The bulk of my time was spent looking for ways to get the water out of the foggers quickly and easily. Initially I saw a small, low cost pump on the Menards website. After some testing I found that it wouldn’t be fast enough. I looked for potential solutions at every store I could think of.

After many hours of exploring my options and driving around town I identified a pump at Fleet Farm that seemed promising. It was a little more than I wanted to spend, but still fairly reasonable. This pump is intended to transfer water into or out of pools or storage tanks over a distance of no more than 30 feet. This is almost perfect for our needs. The pump is a lot faster than the siphon method. It is, however, both louder and slightly more cumbersome. Before tomorrow’s rehearsal I will attempt to put a larger base and a switch on the pump. That should make it easier to work with.

I have a few other notes to work on tomorrow as well. The PVC pipe sleeves need to be installed. I don’t intend to do them all myself, but I need to test my method for installing them. If it works I can have a crew doing that on Monday. I also need to do a better job of dressing/secure the fogger cables. I wanted to have that done for today, but I ran out of time.
Hamilton and I talked about the fog effects several times over the evening. The timing of the effects is changing again, but we ran out of dry ice to test the new plan. All of the laboratory fog has been run ‘in scene’ by the character Gorgo, and now Victor will be doing a little of it as well. It makes a lot of sense as it gives them some fairly odd, scientific looking business. But we have changed when and how much fog we want several times over the last two rehearsals and it has resulted in some confusion for the actor playing Gorgo. This is why we ran out of dry ice tonight. I’m hopeful that this will be the last change to the times and intensity of the fog. The actors need to be comfortable with the proper timing and volume of dry ice for this to be effective. I’m going to do my best to help, and keep a little more dry ice on hand.

10/9/16

I did a test of the PVC sleeves today. I installed 4 of them. The downside is that the notches we cut into the PVC last week are not big enough. So there is a bit more alteration that needs to happen. The upside is that, after giving the adhesive time to dry, Wegleitner and I think they will work. Installing them is a somewhat slow process, but it’s not difficult. I’ll have a crew working on it tomorrow and hopefully they can get things finished without issue. I also spent some time in the morning making the water pump easier to use, putting a base on it and attaching a power strip to that base so that the crew has an accessible switch to turn it on and off.
There was a significant spill when the crew was filling the foggers on top of the platform during their preshow. There were a lot of people around, including me, so we contained the water fairly quickly. It was obvious to me right away what the mistake was. When filling the fog machine with water there are two ways to get the level right. The first is to carefully fill the machine until you see the water line reach a mark on the side of the machine. The second is to plug the machine in and slowly add water until a green indicator light turns on. This is the method the crew was attempting to use, but they didn’t plug the machines in first. This is exactly why I bought towels and carpet mats for the platform fog machines. The spill was contained quickly and, other than an embarrassed crew member, there didn’t seem to be any damage.

I set the floor fogger for maximum duration today, and turned down its temperature a bit to try and get a little extra time. It added between 45 seconds and a minute to the scene, but that wasn’t enough. I don’t want to turn down the temperature too much as it would lessen the initial burst of fog, and Hamilton wants the effect to start strong. This was something I was pondering when, at intermission, we got a note that one of the foggers on the platform was causing a lot of discomfort to an actor who needs to crawl up next to it during the creation scene. Hamilton proposed we solve two problems at once by moving one of the foggers off the platform and using it to supplement the large floor fogger. I’m not entirely sure how that’s going to work out in execution, but we will try it tomorrow.
I’d be lying if I said this isn’t becoming discouraging. It’s getting really late in the process for me to be comfortable with all the changes. But if Hamilton is willing to change the blocking again to try a new approach I’ll move some fog machines around. Perhaps this will be the solution we’ve been searching for.

10/10/16

It was good to have the shop open again today. We were able to get a lot accomplished. I had a team working on the PVC sleeves. They were all installed by the end of the day. I found that some of them came loose during rehearsal, so I stayed for a bit afterwards and did my best to re-adhere them. I grew quite disappointed as I was doing this. There were several that looked pretty bad, and several others that were clearly done in the fastest manner possible. The idea of working quickly is a fine one, but doing a mediocre job for the sake of speed creates as many problems as it solves. I took care of it tonight so that Wegleitner can paint them in the morning with the adhesive fully cured.

I spent more time on the fog today. I tested my newest strategy to make the floor fogger last longer. When that was unsuccessful I ran a few tests to use it in conjunction with the fogger that has been removed from the platform. I think this has potential to work out. I also spent time looking for ways to make the lone fogger up on the platform a bit more omnidirectional in its dispersion. An hour exploring the options available to me in the shop left me with nothing I liked so I went out shopping again. I
found a fitting designed to keep rodents and other animals out of venting. Its shape and the style of the openings cut into it should provide an even dispersion. The test I ran showed promise and I was excited to see it work in the scene.

In action the second floor fogger was a bit underwhelming but I think it can be finessed. The stagehand running the supplemental fogger did her best with a few minutes of warning. The laboratory fog was a bit rough. I think the constant change is causing some confusion. I had to climb up to the platform halfway through the first act and talk the actor playing Gorgo through a few things. The final creation fog effect looked different than it had on any previous day. Until now we had tubing running to either side of the creature that poured the fog off the sides of the platform. Since Hamilton asked for an omnidirectional dispersion from the lone platform fogger we have had to change the location that it vents from. Now the fog is trapped by the shroud over the puppet and falls through the gaps between boards. It is a different visual, but it is a lot of dense fog and I think it works for the scene.

Hamilton has consistently given me notes on the fog in every scene, and she gives them to me as they are happening every night. Tonight she didn’t say a word other than asking me talk with Gorgo at one point. I sat down with her at intermission and asked her about it. I didn’t receive much in the way of feedback. The gist of her thoughts was expressed when she said “it is what it is.” I was honestly somewhat astounded. I pushed her for her thoughts on the floor fog and the creation scene and I didn’t get a lot to work with. I can’t tell if she’s underwhelmed, disappointed or just
had too much else on her mind. An opinion of any kind would have been fine with me. If she hated it I would know what I can do to improve it. If she had liked it I would have known what elements to push. But at this point all I have are my observations, which admittedly come with baggage. I couldn’t begin to know exactly how many hours I’ve spent trying to get the fog to look the way she wants. I have some small alterations that I will make for tomorrow. But it’s disappointing to me that, after scrambling to make these effects work every day, the response to them is essentially ‘eh.’

10/11/16

I think we are creating the best effects we can with the current arrangement of the foggers. The cast member operating the fogger on the platform did a good job with the amount and timing, as did the crew operating the other two on the floor.

Our budget is getting tight. Yesterday it became apparent that I am going to spend every dollar in the budget, and over half of it will have been for dry ice and fog related expenses. While watching the run it also occurred to me that they will probably want fog during photo call, which was confirmed after the rehearsal. I honestly don’t know if we can afford the extra batch of ice. Typically, when I buy the dry ice I will buy a few pounds extra to make up for what is lost when it sits in a cooler for several hours. I could perhaps stop doing that and save a little money, but I don’t want to skimp on the effect when we finally have it dialed in.
10/12/16

I spent some time walking Burk through the locations of, and power sources for, the fog machines. I’m going to be out of town this weekend and I wanted to make sure he understood what was going on. As the assistant technical director he will be the person on call if something goes wrong while I am away. I don’t anticipate him needing to do anything beyond purchasing the dry ice, which I also walked him through.

I checked my math and we are definitely going to go over budget. All of this dry ice is very expensive. The fluid nature of this process required me to move fast. Having to solve new problems almost daily for much of the technical rehearsal process took a lot of time and money. I’m not proud of the idea of going over budget, especially because at the start of this process it looked like I could come in well under. But after talking with Grubb I’m not going to dwell on it.

The preview performance went well and the show opens tomorrow. I have one small note to take care of in the afternoon and then I will be finished unless something needs to be fixed during the run. I’m looking forward to a night off.

10/23/16

*Frankenstein* is closed. Strike was a fairly quick process. Taking the platform down took almost exactly as much time as I expected. Smith and his crew needed to remove the lights and cable from the underside of the platform. That took a little longer than I thought it might, but he also pulled the power cables for the foggers while
they were working. That was a big help as it meant the scenic crew could immediately begin removing the deck boards and focus on the steel frame. We worked very methodically, cutting out each long truss one by one until only the two short ends were left connecting the ladders. We then disconnected the ladders from the floor and laid them down to cut out the short trusses that connected them. The process was a bit slow, but with extra people around and the weight of the steel we were cutting it was prudent to take our time. I had a team working on draining and storing the foggers until I can bring the borrowed units back to their owner. That seemed to go well, though I’ll want to give everything a final inspection before I return it. That will likely be some time from now, as I am also the technical director for Carrie, a musical that opens in just over three weeks.

From what I can gather the show was a success. I’m happy it got the response it did, and also relieved that the process is complete.
CHAPTER IV

POST-PRODUCTION ANALYSIS

*Frankenstein* closed on October 23, 2016. From the perspective of this technical director, his work on the production was successful. Sawle received several positive comments about the set and scenic designer, Erin Wegleitner, and director, Heather Hamilton seemed pleased by the final product. But the process itself was atypical in several ways. The director’s concept changed multiple times during the rehearsal process, resulting in design delays that put the scene shop well behind schedule. Many of Sawle’s early estimations were accurate, which should have made this a relatively straightforward build. However, the fluid nature of this production complicated that. In addition to the alterations made to the set, the element of dry ice fog was introduced. While at first it was a small request, the fog quickly became a large challenge in its own right. As this is the final opportunity to reflect on both the set and the production as a whole, this chapter will cover several topics. It will look at Sawle’s early budget and material projections. It will then briefly comment on the set as a physical product, and discuss the skills learned by the students who built it. Though examination of the production process as a whole will finally comprise a majority of this
chapter, Sawle will first look back to Chapter I of this document to identify points of strength or weakness within his early analysis.

Many of Sawle’s early material estimations turned out to be correct. The set required Sawle to purchase both lumber and steel. In both cases Sawle attempted to buy enough material to finish the set while accounting for the possibility of a mistake somewhere in the process. This meant that Sawle ordered a bit more than was absolutely necessary. Thankfully, the extra material turned out to be unnecessary in this case, and was sorted into the general stock of the shop. Sawle’s early cost estimates were also mostly accurate. The final prices of the lumber and steel orders were, in both instances, slightly less than what was budgeted. The hardware purchases also came in below Sawle’s estimate, using only $115.00 of his $150.00 allocation. However, these strong aspects of the early analysis are not without a counterpoint. Sawle’s estimations were less reliable when it came to the dry ice and other fog related purchases. As the fog effects were added several weeks into the process, there was limited time to experiment. This resulted in significant ambiguity concerning the amount of dry ice needed, and subsequently made estimating that cost very difficult. With only a partial estimation of costs in place at the start of the build, Sawle was confident the set would come in under its budget of $1500.00. He was nearly correct. The total expenses for the scene shop were $1593.03. Review of the expenditures shows that dry ice and related expenses constituted $1015.59 of that total. Had the pace ultimately been less frantic, it seems likely that those costs could have been
reduced. While Sawle is less than pleased about going over budget, the overage is small. Keeping up with the daily changes during the technical rehearsal process required him to move quickly and as the amount of dry ice needed increased, so did the cost.

In practice the construction methods and materials used in the set followed the plan Sawle outlined in Chapter I. The steel trusses were systematically laid out using welding jigs, and students welded the trusses over the course of several days. The process of assembling and stabilizing the platform was approached as methodically as possible. There were specific problems that at times slowed progress but, as a finished product, Sawle thinks that the set was quite successful. It looked like a completed, cohesive unit and it had the strength and stability to safely support the cast moving atop it. Sawle feels much of that success can be attributed to proper planning and his insistence on a methodical process that emphasized attention to quality and accuracy. Just as importantly, this methodical process helped keep people safe. Working with steel can be hazardous, particularly for inexperienced labor. Sawle made it a point to inform students of sources of potential injury. To his knowledge no one was hurt as the students built, and later cut apart, the steel frame of the structure.

Sawle anticipated the need to teach several students basic techniques for working with steel. He had initially planned to use the few experienced welders in the shop to both build the set and teach other students at the same time. In reality that became impractical for reasons of time and staffing. Sawle instead made the choice to
teach a small group of undergraduate students to weld. Sean Burk (the production’s assistant technical director), Carly Kilgard and Alex Blesi first learned why the shop was building welding jigs, and then assembled the jigs they would be using. They were then given a demonstration of the tools and processes they would be expected to use to weld the steel, including the proper inspection of each weld. These students then performed a majority of the welding required. Sawle stepped in to offer assistance or do some welding himself when the situation called for it, but whenever possible there was a student welding the set for *Frankenstein*. Sawle was very proud of the work of these students, especially Kilgard, who proved herself to be quite adept. Had there been extra time he would have liked to focus more on developing these skills in other students. Ultimately, though it didn’t exactly follow the original plan, Sawle feels he was able to effectively instruct the students as they learned to work with steel.

Previous chapters of this document mention the difficulty in arriving at a design, and the challenges of realizing it on schedule. This chapter will now provide an examination of these larger processes and the way they impacted Sawle’s work on *Frankenstein*. This production process was behind from the beginning. Hamilton’s sabbatical during the 2015-2016 academic year meant that production meetings did not begin late in the spring of 2016 as would be typical. Meetings instead began on August 25. This late start to the process was exacerbated when the concept began to morph. Wegleitner, who was also designing and building the puppet, seemed like she was struggling to arrive at a finished scenic design. When the concept changed,
Wegleitner’s design fell further behind schedule. The frequent changes meant that at a time when the production team should have been honing in and refining aspects of the design, things like furniture and dry ice fog were being added. The result was indecision at a point when the shop was rapidly losing time to build.

This portion of the process became stressful for Sawle. In reality, little about the platform changed once its location and relative size were established. Perhaps construction could have started sooner, but Sawle didn’t have any design drawings of the set to work with. From his perspective, until the technical director has drawings and concrete numbers to build from, everything is hypothetical. While it is true that on many shows some specific elements can be built without drafting of any kind, it would be irresponsible to start building a set with no designs yet committed to paper. So Sawle waited and did his best to help Wegleiter along the way. He worked with her in the Andreas Theater to check sightlines, showed her various options of materials for the platform and generally offered his help when appropriate. But as the process moved forward Sawle’s attempts to be a resource did not seem to be successful. Sawle expressed his concern to Hamilton, who then set a new deadline that was three weeks later than the first. When the design did come in, the subsequent rush to get underway meant that certain problems were overlooked.

The delays in arriving at a scenic design meant that the shop would be under pressure to get the set finished in time for technical rehearsals. Sawle worked as fast as he could while taking the time to teach and supervise, but a fast pace was needed to
complete the set on time. This left little time for error, and also less time to look at things twice. The result was that problems were not always identified early. These problems often found their way to the shop, where they would slow or stop work while Sawle would attempt to solve them. A good example of this is the day the shop discovered there was a problem with the ladder drafting. Sawle should have noticed this when he was examining the design, but in his haste he didn’t. As a result the shop lost time to work on the ladders while the issue was resolved. Whenever possible Sawle attempts to avoid this situation by double checking projects before they are in progress. He feels this is an important step, as instances like this impact more than just the amount of time lost in a particular moment. They can also influence morale in the shop as people find themselves repeating work or waiting around for instructions.

Sawle did his best to manage the build process and stay ahead of potential problems. While situations like this were not common, they occurred often enough to have an effect on the pace of the build.

The accelerated process also affected the ways Sawle was able to work with Burk on the build. Sawle wanted Burk to be more involved in the drafting and material estimation phases of the build, as these are areas where Burk has limited experience. This became unrealistic as the design fell behind and time ran short. Burk was, however, an integral part of the show. He attended production meetings, and was involved in as much of Sawle’s process as was possible. As the build got underway Sawle relied heavily on Burk to supervise the shop on a day-to-day basis. Sawle would
typically get the shop started by dividing up the labor pool and delegating tasks. He would also explain each job and the goals of the day to Burk, and then allow him to manage things while Sawle attended to other issues. In this way Burk was able to learn both by observing Sawle and by directly participating in the daily operation of the shop. Whenever possible, Sawle attempted to point out the methods he was using and the rationale behind them. While the situation was not ideal, Sawle feels that the pair made the best they could of it. Having Burk as a reliable presence during this build was extremely helpful to Sawle, and he hopes that Burk gained useful experience as well.

As noted above, the addition of dry ice fog to the production occurred several weeks into the design process. Sawle does his best to be accommodating with changes, especially during the early stages of a production. When the idea was introduced in the September 15 production meeting, it was a relatively limited request. Hamilton initially asked for dry ice in the laboratory scenes. Sawle had no problem with the idea, thinking it was a good way to add some extra ambiance. The shop was still waiting on designs at that point but Hamilton’s first request for fog was small, and Sawle had no reason to say no. In the following week’s production meeting Hamilton asked to add fog to the stage floor as well. At the time Sawle had not been able to test any ideas, but again the request seemed simple enough to achieve. After Sawle and Burk’s unsuccessful first round of testing, Sawle felt the need to come up with a solution quickly. The borrowed dry ice foggers were the best option he could find in terms of time and money, but they also became very difficult to integrate into the show.
In retrospect Sawle feels it was time and communication that made the inclusion of the foggers as problematic as it was. The original plan was to hide the foggers under the lab table and for them to reside there throughout the show. Due to miscommunication at some point, Sawle was unaware that the plan was to strike all props and furniture from the laboratory at intermission. When it became clear that this was the case, it was decided that the foggers would be used from the stage floor. The new plan was that they would exist in rolling wooden cases. The intention being that they would ultimately be disguised and connected to tubing on the set. It was at this point that communication really broke down. After consulting with Wegleitner, Sawle came up with some rolling boxes to house the foggers. Once they were completed, Sawle needed two pieces of information. He needed to know how Hamilton intended to use them in the show, and where he should place the tubing that they would connect to. Wegleitner stated she had been planning to use tubing or cable as set dressing in the first place, but there were no designer drawings or renderings that showed it. Sawle asked Wegleiter where on the set he should run the fog tubes, but there was never a clear answer about how he should proceed. This was partially due to neither Sawle nor Wegleitner knowing how Hamilton wanted to use the units. Sawle requested this information from the stage manager, Jayme Beerling, on more than one occasion, and was told that they hadn’t been blocked into the show yet. Ultimately, the fogger boxes were cut from the show a week after Sawle was asked to make them. At the time Sawle had no way of knowing they would never be used. So, with a set to
finish and no new information regarding the fog, Sawle focused his attention on the completion and stabilization of the platform. The situation was left unresolved for several days, until the meeting on October 6, when Hamilton requested that the foggers move back onto the platform.

Sawle’s journal documents the events that followed, and the continuing struggle to get the effects to work the way Hamilton wanted them to. Looking back, Sawle has mixed feelings. The process of achieving the fog effects was stressful and time consuming. Sawle spent a lot of his own time working on them, perhaps too much. At the time his concern was meeting the needs of the show, and in the moment it seemed the best way to do that was to keep up with the changes. However, Sawle ended up stressing himself to the point of both exhaustion and frustration. He was able to put in an amount of time that, while productive, was unsustainable. Sawle’s efforts were ultimately successful but this is due in no small part to the help of department technical director, and *Frankenstein* sound designer, George Grubb. Grubb purchased a large dry ice fogger for the department. This gave Sawle an extra unit to work with and made the fog possible in the first scene. He also gave Sawle extra time to work on the foggers prior to the first technical rehearsal. Grubb’s help, and the sheer amount of extra time Sawle was able to devote, may not always be possible. To expect it on every show would be unrealistic and unfair to future students. Based on comments relayed to Sawle by Hamilton, his effort was successful. While these effects were definitely the most vexing part of the technical rehearsal process, Sawle is happy with the results.
Frankenstein was a difficult experience for Sawle. Several changes to the concept seemed to hinder Wegleitner’s work, delaying a scenic design that was already behind schedule. When the design did come in, there were only 15 shop days to complete the set. In the rush to make the most of the remaining time, Sawle missed problems in the design that caused additional delay. The idea of dry ice fog started with a very manageable request but as the amount of fog desired went up, the process began to break down and communication failed. This resulted in building scenery that would never be used, and several frantic days spent rushing to keep up with the changes requested in technical rehearsals. While the production was successful, and all elements were complete when they needed to be, the process of reaching that point felt overly complicated. Sawle strives for consistency and accuracy in the work he does, regardless of the project or occasion. The frequency of changes while working on this production challenged that approach in a way that few have. Despite the difficulty Sawle is happy to have worked on Frankenstein and takes pride in both the final production, and the skills developed by the students who built the set.
Isaac Sawle received his undergraduate degree in theatre arts in 2010 from Winona State University. He entered the graduate program at Minnesota State University, Mankato in the fall of 2014. In the span of time between these two events he worked professionally in areas such as rigging, scenic carpentry, lighting design, stage management, consulting, teaching and technical direction. Working for high schools, universities, businesses, arenas and theatre companies (both non-profit and commercial) provided experiences and insights that allowed Sawle to grow as a technical director. After several successful years, however, it became apparent that an MFA would be the next logical step for Sawle.

Prior to Frankenstein, the student served five Department of Theatre and Dance productions as the technical director (TD). Gabriel, directed by Michael Sheeks, played in November of 2014. This production served as Sawle’s introduction to both the department’s practices and its student body. It also acclimated him to working in the Andreas Theatre, where most of his productions have been staged. Following Gabriel the student worked on Life is a Dream, directed by Paul J. Hustoles. This was the student’s first mainstage production, his only production on the Ted Paul stage and his first opportunity to work with faculty members on a show. The production was
challenging due to missed deadlines and the scope of the design. The organic nature of the design was difficult to translate into working drawings at times, but it allowed Sawle to experiment with different methods of doing so that will continue to influence the way he works. Ultimately the designer seemed happy with the result and members of the shop staff seemed to be pleased with Sawle’s style of working and communicating.

Sawle finished his first year as the TD for *Venus in Fur*, directed by Tim Rosin. The scenic design for this show was minimal compared to previous shows. However, small did not necessarily indicate simple. Every element that was built needed to hang from the grid of the Andreas. Hanging elements were not new to this TD, but engineering every unit to be able to safely float over the stage was a useful experience. The design, while small in scope, did include several elements that were not typical and the TD took the opportunity to use methods of construction that will inform how he builds similar scenery. After working the final play of the 2014-2015 season, Sawle was the TD for the first show of the 2015-2016 season. *The Haunting of Hill House*, directed by Rosin, was a frustrating production for Sawle. The scenic design was non-existent when the deadline arrived, and, after changing designers twice, the TD received the designs with 14 working days to have the set ready. This left things feeling frantic, and very under-planned. While the process was exasperating for Sawle, he was satisfied with the final product. John David Paul, faculty member and scenic designer for *Life is a Dream* and *The Haunting of Hill House*, was very happy with Sawle’s performance as well.
Sawle’s next technical direction project was Antigone. This production, directed by Matthew Caron and featuring a scenic design by David McCarl, required a large amount of time to properly plan and build. Fortunately this design process stayed on track, and McCarl was ready with draftings when the deadline arrived. This allowed Sawle to manage the build process in a more controlled fashion, enabling the attention to detail that the design called for. McCarl’s design required the incorporation of layers of insulation foam that would be carved or cut to look like weathered stone. Fortunately this student had a good deal of experience working with foam, and was able to incorporate that knowledge into this process. Sawle did his best to run an efficient shop and while his performance was by no means perfect, he feels it was one of his better builds during his time in Mankato.

In addition to production work, the student has at this time completed the majority of the required coursework for his MFA. The courses can be divided into two admittedly broad categories: academic and research focused, and courses based on the art and craft of technical theatre. Sawle’s first research based course was Dramaturgy, with Professor Heather Hamilton. Taken during his first semester, the Dramaturgy course served as a very useful re-entry into academic thought and writing. The project-based nature of the class gave him the freedom to work in his own way while adjusting to being a student again, and to explore dramatic works in ways he rarely can in his field.
The Theatre Theory and Criticism and Theatre History II courses were taken concurrently, and both taught by Hamilton. This pairing is very sensible, as much of the subject material from each course informs the other. Theatre History II picks up with the Enlightenment movement and covers material through to contemporary theatre. Hamilton’s choices of plays to study were, for the most part, new to the student. Additionally, Hamilton’s requirement that graduate students teach/mentor a group of undergraduates during each Friday’s class gave the student an opportunity to impart some of his knowledge to others. Sawle chose to make the weekly meeting discussion based, and facilitated sessions that attempted to reinforce the week’s topics by looking for connections between plays, playwrights and the historical periods that they were a part of.

Theatre Theory and Criticism is one of the few courses exclusive to graduate students. The specific theories and personalities covered in the course were less familiar than in Theatre History II, but coupled nicely with them. The course involved a lot of discussion and debate, with Hamilton guiding the conversations but allowing students to arrive at their own conclusions. Through the course Sawle gained a deeper understanding of movements and theory within theatre. He also thoroughly enjoyed the opportunity to dissect and argue about major artistic concepts with his classmates.

Another course that falls into the academic and research based category is Theatre Research. The course, taught by Matthew Caron, was an excellent exercise in academic writing, and this student cannot deny that his writing improved due to his
work in the course. However, in practice it seems that the goals of the course are more focused on the act of writing papers rather than the research. In addition, a requirement in both Theatre Theory and Criticism and Theatre Research is the submission of a paper for publication, with the goal of “de-mystifying” that process. But is it as vexing or intimidating as it once was? Submitting papers for review is typically accomplished via an email attachment or a form on a website, and did not feel particularly daunting when investigated.

Caron was also the instructor of the Theatre Management and Theatre History I courses Sawle took in the spring of 2016. Theatre Management was a challenging course for Sawle, but also quite interesting. The coursework forced Sawle to delve into the world of upper level management, organizational structure and budgeting for an entire company. The course explored these topics as they related to theatres of various sizes and in differing spheres. This is not Sawle’s area of expertise, but his experience managing budgets and employees gave him some practical insights that helped him succeed. Caron also assigned special graduate student projects that allowed Sawle the opportunity to give a lecture about a relevant topic of his choosing. Sawle used some of his time to discuss managing scene shops, and the lessons he has learned doing so. Again, Sawle found this aspect of the course both instructional and enjoyable.

Theatre History I was not as participatory. This lecture-based class began with the ancient Greeks and covered material until the Enlightenment. Many of the plays studied in the class were familiar to Sawle, but the ritualistic nature of early theatre is a
topic that he is always happy to learn more about. The span of time the course needs to cover is vast and the daily structure was very rigid, allowing for little discussion or critical thought about the topic of the day. An understanding of theatre history should be important to anyone hoping to succeed in this field. Sawle recognizes this fact, but feels that quizzing the students about the minutiae of each reading is an inconsistent method of encouraging comprehension of the play and its connections to the time that produced it. While Sawle finds history, especially ancient Greece and Rome, fascinating, the format of the course is not something he would be eager to repeat.

This student has also taken a large number of courses that focus on learning the art and craft of technical theatre. Scene Design I, taught by Paul, gave the student a useful review of the process of scene design, as well as the opportunity to experiment without the practical realities of scenery engineering and construction. It also gave the student insight into Paul’s methods and style, which is always useful in a TD - designer relationship. Paul also instructed the student in Portfolio Seminar. The student found it somewhat perplexing that he took the course in his first semester, as he would not be applying for jobs for several years. However, seeing the individual presentation aesthetics and styles of each student in the course gave this student a lot to think about regarding his own. Costume Design I, with David McCarl, was a course that this student found difficult. But the information he gained from the course provided insight into an area of theatre that the student has no practical experience with. This certainly
provides him with a deeper well of information regarding the duties and challenges faced by a costume designer, which the student is glad to have.

Technical Direction I was the first course on technical direction the student has ever had the opportunity to take. The course was taught by this student’s supervisor and advisor George Grubb. As technical direction is a relatively young area of focus, the duties and expectations of a TD are far from codified and can vary widely by company and venue. With this in mind, the material Technical Direction I covers felt mostly appropriate as it is an introductory course. But this student also found the course exasperating at times. There was inconsistency in the preparedness of the instructor day to day, and the lecture or demonstration sometimes seemed under-planned. Assignments were not returned to the students, neither were grades posted to the course page. Though it covered different topics, Advanced Technical Direction had many of the same problems. Inconsistency in the daily operations of the course and the lectures became stressful to the students. That being said, the courses were a useful opportunity for Sawle. The projects gave him incentive to refine his own methods or try new ones where appropriate. In addition, while he and Grubb each have their own styles, the course offered a unique setting from which those styles could be examined outside of a working shop environment.

Sawle has completed two other courses taught by Grubb, the first being Advanced Theatre Drafting. This course covered hand and computer aided drafting, as well as three-dimensional drafting. The course itself is extremely important, and Sawle
feels that both hand and computer-aided drafting are useful skills in their own rights.

Due to the way it was scheduled, the course only met once a week in a two-hour class session. In Sawle’s opinion this was a difficult arrangement. During each session a week’s worth of concepts needed to be covered while leaving time for questions and explanations of the next week’s assignment. This format was difficult and, while Grubb found a way to make it work by offering his time through lab hours outside of class, Sawle feels future iterations of this course would benefit from a different schedule.

Sound Design I is the final theatre class Sawle will cover. This course is intended to teach the basic skills and information needed to design sound for the theatre. Sawle had no real experience designing sound prior to this course. In fact it was his first opportunity to take a course exclusively focused on sound. Sawle enjoyed the subject matter of the course, and the new perspectives he gained while working on the assignments. While the material and coursework felt appropriate and effective, the course itself had many of the same issues Sawle noted in previous classes. As the semester progressed, the grading and return of assignments became sporadic. Likewise, the gradebook was not kept up to date, leaving students unsure about their progress. Ultimately, Sawle found the course more challenging than he anticipated, but also feels that he gained knowledge that will be helpful in the future.

The final course this chapter will discuss was taken outside the Department of Theatre and Dance. To fill an elective slot, this student enrolled in Construction Safety under the instruction of Tim Brown of the Construction Management Department. This
course provided the student with invaluable information about the purview, methods and rationale of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). In addition to learning about OSHA and OSHA safety requirements, hazard recognition and avoidance were major aspects of the course. This information would be extremely useful to the process of anyone fabricating scenery. Keeping employees and volunteers safe should always be a priority in a shop setting. Additionally, understanding and interacting with OSHA and local safety authorities is something that a TD must be prepared to do. The student also gained an edge through this course in the form of an OSHA 30-hour certification, something that is still fairly uncommon in his field.

A final component of Sawle’s time at Minnesota State Mankato is his assistantship. The majority of his assignment is working as a supervisor in the university scene shop. He works to teach and supervise the student crews that build the sets for the department. Sawle has a history of experience in teaching and working alongside unskilled labor, and he has continued to learn and improve during his time in Mankato. Being a technical direction student, Sawle is often one of the students left in charge when Grubb cannot be present. This gives the assistantship another aspect, as it can mean the student is sometimes supervising the entire shop. Graduate students assigned to work in the scene shop undoubtedly benefit from both the practical experience of fabricating scenery, and from the opportunity to lead disparate groups of people. While this is certainly true for this student, he also appreciates the chance to expand beyond the shop. At the beginning of his third year in the program, Sawle
started working five hours a week as a sound assistant. This has been a great opportunity for Sawle. Despite many years working as a technician for various organizations, he has little formal training in sound. This aspect of his assistantship, when combined with the sound classes he is taking during his final year, will give Sawle experience and training that fill in gaps in his previous experience.

During his time at Minnesota State University, Mankato this student has worked on several productions, taken a wide variety of courses and worked as both a shop supervisor and sound assistant for the department. Through coursework he has become a more informed, well-rounded individual. The productions and assistantship have given him additional experiences and provided opportunity for experimentation with his own methods. The student has attempted to integrate new skills and knowledge into his process, and feels that he has been mostly successful in his efforts. Sawle hopes that his progress thus far indicates his desire to succeed and continue to learn during the remainder of his time at Minnesota State Manakto.
APPENDIX A

TECHNICAL DRAWINGS

DESIGNER’S GROUNDPLAN

N.B.: APPENDIX NOT TO SCALE
DESIGNER DRAFTING – PLATFORM TOP VIEW

DESIGNER DRAFTING – PLATFORM SIDE VIEW
DESIGNER DRAFTING – LADDER FRONT VIEW
Steel Cut List

10'-4"
Interior Truss:
10 Pieces Straight Cut

9'-0"
Exterior Truss A
4 Pieces w/ 22.5 deg mitres

5'-0"
Exterior Truss B
4 Pieces w/ 22.5 deg mitres

1'0 3/4"
Exterior Truss C
8 Pieces w/ 22.5 deg mitres

1"x2"x14ga
Rectangular Tube
Viewed from Top

SHOP DRAWING – STEEL CUT SHEET
SHOP DRAWING – TRUSS JIGS

Drawn by: I. Sawle

Frankenstein 1930

Not To Scale

Interior Truss
-5 needed

Interior Blocks:
-2 @ 2"
-2 @ 9"
-8 @ 10"

Interior Truss Jig

Exterior Truss A
-2 needed

Exterior Truss Jig A

Interior Blocks:
-2 @ 8
-7 @ 10"

Notes:
- Steel shown for reference only, indicated by grey
- Jig blocks and bases are precut
- Inner blocks needed are indicated in each drawing
- Exterior blocks drawn as a reference, exact position can vary
- Assemble with screws
- All trusses are symmetrical

Jig Layout #1
SHOP DRAWING – TRUSS JIGS

NOTES:
-Steel shown for reference only, indicated by grey
-Jig blocks and bases are precut
-Inner blocks needed are indicated in each drawing
-Exterior blocks drawn as a reference, exact position can vary
-Assemble with screws
-All trusses are symmetrical

Jig Layout #2
Notes:
- All trusses are in loading dock
- Lay truss out carefully to protect floor treatment
- Lay down welding blankets under all welds

Platform Assembly
Quick Reference Sheet
APPENDIX B

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHS

TRUSS JIG EXAMPLES

TRUSS JIG DETAIL
WELDING TRUSSES USING A JIG
LADDER JIG

ASSEMBLY OF STRUCTURE AND FLOORBOARDS
FOG IN THE GRAVEYARD

VICTOR AND GORGO ASSEMBLE THE CREATURE


