Scenic Design for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*

By Stephen Adly Guirgis

Thesis

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By

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Abstract

For my thesis I will be designing scenery for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* by Stephan Adly Guirgis. I am excited to work on this production for multiple reasons. First I would like to design in our thrust space, the Bowen Theatre, for a second time due to the challenges such as its fixed grid, limited back stage space, three sided audience and intimacy of the space. Personally the subject matter of the play hits close to home for me having grown up as a Catholic school student. I enjoy seeing these biblical characters and stories portrayed in current, raw and more truly human ways than they were typically portrayed in my religious training. Finally I found the ability to collaborate with director Jimmy Bohr to be a great learning experience last year when we worked together on the OSU Department of Theatre’s production of *Spring Awakening*. I feel that he has a great ability to connect a design team and I’m eager to collaborate with him on another production.
If you’re going through hell, keep going.

Winston Churchill
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Vita

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Fields of Study

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Chapter One: The Production Situation

On November 10, 2011 The Ohio State University Department of Theatre opened its production of Stephen Adly Guirgis' play, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*. The Bowen Theatre in the Drake Performance and Event Center was the location for this production. The Bowen Theatre is a thrust space that seats 250 audience members on three sides of the stage in stadium style seating. There are two vomitoriums (voms) house right and left for audience and actor entrances. The fixed stage decking sits 16” above the theatre floor. Minor additions can be added to the stage, but no subtractions or cuts into it are allowed. The distance from the front edge of the stage to cinder block back wall is 32’-0”. The downstage portion of the thrust is 20’-0” wide and the upstage deck is 50’ wide. There is a moat around the thrust that is 5’-0” from the edge of the stage to the audience risers. Stage left and right of the upstage deck there is 12’-0” by 16’0” of floor space. Small scenic items may be stored here, but larger wagons or other scenic elements cannot due to these being high traffic areas for actors. There are also issues with noise control and audience sightlines, which make this area difficult to mask. The back wall is 80’ wide by 26’-9” tall, with three actor entrances. The double door located center stage is 8’0” wide by 7’-11” tall. There are identical sets of double doors stage right and left that are 6’-0” wide by
7’-11” tall. Hanging over the stage there is a fixed tension grid that is 16’-0” above the stage. Due to space restraints above the grid and the fixed grid itself, it is very difficult to fly scenery and almost impossible to mask. A booth for the stage manager and light board operator is located downstage right. Another booth for the sound board operator is located stage right. There is a catwalk that outlines the stage right and downstage walls. Bowen has a stock of 10, 10’-0” by 15’-6” black velour curtains and 10, 10’-0” by 18’-0” black velour curtains for masking.

The total budget allotted for this production was $9,430. The scenery budget was $1,500. The costume budget was $3,500. The lighting budget was $1,500. The properties budget was $1,000.

The members of the production team were: chair of the department, producer and my advisor Associate Professor Dan Gray, faculty director Assistant Professor Jimmy Bohr, undergraduate assistant director Drew Doherty, production manager Eric Mayer, undergraduate production stage manager Jadyn Benedict, undergraduate assistant stage managers Ian Klingenberg and Caitlyn Loeffler, technical director and Scenic Studio Manager Chad Mahan, technology manager Jim Knapp, graduate costume designer Lauren Bush, costumes realized by faculty costume designer Associate Professor Kristine Kearney and costume studio manager Rebecca Turk, staff lighting studio manager and lighting designer Matthew Hazard, undergraduate sound designer
Ruth Luketic, graduate video designer Phil Garrett and graduate dramaturg Elizabeth Harelik.

The staff and students constructed the scenery in the department’s scenic studio located one floor below the Bowen Theatre. A freight elevator measuring 7’-11” wide by 5’-1” wide by 7’-6” tall and a narrow stairwell connects the theatre to the studio. Larger items were built within the space itself so they could be constructed as one solid piece rather than as smaller ones constructed off site and assembled on stage since they would not fit in the freight elevator. Some platforming was designed with minimal framework and piecing them together would add undesired mass.

Our first design meeting took place on July 5, 2011. At this meeting we discussed faculty director Jimmy Bohr’s concept statement (see appendix A page) and began to discuss preliminary design ideas. We looked at our goals for the summer and scheduled the following deadlines around the team’s summer schedules. Rough design ideas, sketches and ground plans were due on July 19. Preliminary scenic and costume designs were due on August 4. Final designs were due on August 30. Scenic construction would begin on September 21 the first day of Fall Quarter. Actors would begin rehearsing on the stage October 26. Crew watch would be on October 28. Technical rehearsals would begin on November 1 and dress rehearsals would begin on November 4. Opening night
was November 10. The production closed on November 20 after 9 performances. The set was struck during the week of November 21.
Chapter 2: Synopsis and Analysis

*The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* by Stephen Adly Guirgis is the fictional telling of the trial of Judas Iscariot in purgatory. The play was first produced in 2005 at the Labyrinth Theatre Company in New York City where Guirgis is one of three artistic directors. As stated on the company's website, "Labyrinth Theatre Company was founded in 1992 by a small group of actors who wanted to push their artistic limits and tell new, more inclusive stories that expanded the boundaries of mainstream theatre." In my opinion, this statement holds no truer than in the writing of Guirgis. Some of his other works include, *Jesus Hopped the "A" Train, The Little Flower of East Orange, Our Lady of 121st Street,* and *The Motherf**ker with the Hat.* Imprisonment and religion are themes that flow through many of Guirgis' plays. "Underneath many of his foul-mouthed characters were man and women, usually poor and unlucky, who had nonetheless not given up searching for meaning, for answers and for a modicum faith" (Martin 17). In an interview for the *New York Times* by Bruce Weber, Guirgis calls himself a “lost Catholic.” Remarkably, this mirrors my feeling of being a “broken Catholic.” Possibly what is broken can be fixed and as sung in Amazing Grace, “I once was lost, but now found.” Perhaps one day our Catholic faiths will be healed or we will at least find peace within our own, individual
faiths. This loss of faith is a major theme in *Judas*. Judas himself is lost and alone and is waiting to be found. Since the third grade the story of Judas had always been intriguing to Guirgis. "He believed in a loving God, and the idea that God had consigned Judas to a place called hell ‘just stopped me in my tracks’ " (Martin 19). With this need to further his understanding of Judas and his own faith, the proper time would need to present itself for Guirgis to write this play. Oddly it happened by chance. In 2003 John Ortiz, the then artistic director of LAByrinth contacted Guirgis. "You’re writing something, right? At a loss, Stephan blurted out, *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*" (Martin 23).

The play opens with a mother’s plea. Henrietta Iscariot, Judas’ mother directly addresses the audience as the story begins. This style of story telling happens occasionally throughout the play. Characters break the “fourth wall” to directly speak of there feelings, thoughts and beliefs of Judas and his relationship with Jesus. Through Henrietta’s speech we are reminded that no matter how Judas may have been perceived throughout history, Judas was human. He was a man who was loved by a mother. She wants us to remember her son in a way that goes well beyond what we all think we know. We are told of how after his death no one was willing to show any sympathy for her son, not even his own sisters. Henrietta says, “I discovered his body alone, I dug his grave alone, I placed him in a hole and covered him with dirt and rock alone” (Guirgis 7). At the end of her speech a man in white comforts her. We later discover he is Jesus.
We are next visited by one of the play’s narrators, Gloria, who is an angel from heaven. She takes a moment to explain to the audience a little about herself then continues to explain where we are. She speaks of the changes that have occurred over time in purgatory and of its current state.

Gloria’s speech transitions the audience into a courtroom in purgatory. We see a judge beginning to call historical cases of betrayal and mistrust to order. When Judge Littlefield is about to dismiss Judas’ case, attorney Fabiana Aziza Cunningham interrupts him. Not much is stated about Cunningham at this point, but she seems to be there fully in support of Judas. The judge wants nothing to do with her attempt to defend Judas. As she continues to fight for her case and the judge’s patience is tested, another attorney enters the space in grand fashion. He announces, “It is I, Yusef Akbar Azziz Al-Nassar Gamel El-Fayoumy” (Guirgis 10). It is obvious that he is a conniving weasel sucking up to the judge to help with his prosecution of Judas. We learn that El-Fayoumy is visiting purgatory from hell and that Cunningham is a resident of purgatory.

As Judge Littlefield becomes even more frustrated in his courtroom we shift to meet another narrator, Saint Monica. Her urban slang and foul mouth add comedy to the tension that is present in the courtroom. She tells us a little of her history and of how she and her son became saints. Through her narrative, she speaks of how Cunningham came to use her gift of “nagging” to gain a writ from God to support her defense of Judas. Saint Monica decides that if she was going
to support the writ she would have to see Judas for herself. This is our first interaction with Judas. He is in limbo in a catatonic state. Through many comic antics she begins to try to wake him from his catatonic state and see who and what he is. Finally she locks eyes with him and is immediately touched by his emptiness and his “paralyzing, immobilizing, overwhelming sadness” (Guirgis 14). She decides to assist Cunningham. In delivering a writ from God we are back in the courtroom and the effort to bring Judas to trial is still up for debate.

Through the next courtroom scene we learn more about Cunningham and Judge Littlefield. Cunningham is of mixed heritage. Her mother was a Romanian Gypsy and her father was a Polish priest who does not believe in God, yet somehow she will use God to her advantage. As she pushes and prods the judge to hear her case she turns the proceedings on him. When Littlefield mentions Judas hanging himself, she retorts that he did the same. It is revealed that Judge Littlefield was a soldier in the Civil War who hung himself as well. This is why he lives in purgatory. Seeing the connection to himself and Judas he decides to allow the case.

Before the trial formally begins we are now introduced to three primary jury members. The first jury member is Gloria the angel from the beginning of the play. The second is Loretta, a cancer patient on life-support and the third, Butch Honeywell, who we learn little about.
The first witness called to the stand is Henrietta Iscariot. We begin to see how each attorney will be trying this case. Cunningham's defense is focused on positive aspects of Judas’ past and to how he could have been manipulated into betraying Jesus whereas El-Fayoumy flatters his witnesses and the judge in an attempt to strengthen his case. Both of their tactics are seen initially while questioning Henrietta. Through questioning we are sent into a flashback of when Judas was a young boy. Cunningham shows the kind nature of Judas as he gives his spinning top to another youth, Matthias of Galilee. El-Fayoumy instantly twists this story by having Henrietta describe what happened the next day when Judas swindled a blind man. We are left with neither attorney truly showing any substantial strength in their case.

The next witness called to the stand by El-Fayoumy is Mother Teresa who adds quite a bit of comic relief to the room. As questioning begins, El-Fayoumy is struck with her greatness and is overwhelmed with emotions. The judge decides to give the blubbery attorney a moment to collect himself and calls a break. During this break we move to testimonials by two saints, Saint Peter and Saint Matthew. These speeches bring well-known biblical characters to life and ground them in reality to help the audience better connect with them and with Judas. This testimonial is similar to Henrietta’s at the beginning of the play. The two men are directly addressing the audience. Both speak of their connection to Jesus and Judas and how they grew to love them both.
Returning to the courtroom following the recess, questioning resumes with Mother Teresa. El-Fayoumy continues his flattering tactics to cover his weak case while Cunningham begins to dig still deeper. She aggressively questions Mother Teresa and begins to doubt her worth as a witness. Guirgis seems to be supporting Judas at this point and is shaming one of the most respected faces of the modern Catholic Church. This is the first instance where I see the Catholic faith being tested and questioned by Guirgis. Growing up Catholic you learn how Judas was represented as bad and all of the good Mother Teresa has done. I find that a play making audiences question these beliefs is truly thought provoking and highly controversial.

The next witness called by Cunningham is Simon the Zealot. He is presented as a bit of a thug currently living in purgatory. The definition of what a zealot is was up for debate in the courtroom and for myself. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary states, “if capitalized it means a member of a fanatical sect arising in Judea during the first century A.D. and militantly opposing the Roman domination of Palestine.” El-Fayoumy attempts his strategy of flattery with Simon in the hopes of furthering his case. Unfortunately Simon has no interest in the flattering attorney’s approach. Luckily for El-Fayoumy, Simon’s responses are simple and vague giving him the opportunity to twist Simon’s answers to support the prosecution’s case. Through Cunningham’s cross-examination, she begins to discover why Jesus didn’t interfere and stop Judas’ betrayal. Is it possible that to make Jesus’ and God’s point, Judas was compelled to do this and
in doing so why should he be punished? With all of these questions up for
debate, Satan is called to the stand by the prosecution.

Timidly, El-Fayoumy begins to question him and then turns to his reliable trick
of flattery that makes him feel as if Satan is on his side. Satan assures the court
that Judas made this choice by his own free will without any assistance from
him. He recalls the evening following the betrayal when he happened to run into
Judas at Bathsheeba’s Bar and Grill. We are then in another flashback.
According to Satan, Judas showed no regret, yet knew he made a huge mistake.
By the end of their meeting Judas turns to anger ending their meeting in
reference to Jesus stating, “fuck that guy, man - he’s a bitch” (Guirgis 40). Back in
the courtroom now, Cunningham is asked to cross-examine; she passes and a
fifteen-minute lunch is called. Intermission occurs at this point.

The second act opens with Saint Monica introducing Mary Magdalene outside of
the court. As in earlier scenes, she too is addressing the audience directly. She is
speaking on Judas’ behalf as someone who was close to Jesus. She believed that
that Judas was Jesus’ favorite out of the twelve disciples, almost an alter ego of
him. She feels that Jesus was at a loss for what happened. It could be construed
that he knew that he had to let Judas take the fall so his mission could be
completed.

Back in the court the defense calls Dr. Sigmund Freud to the stand. El-Fayoumy
instantly believes this witness to be a fake and tries to demonstrate this by
pulling at Freud’s beard. When the beard does not come off, El-Fayoumy must concede the witness is indeed Dr. Freud. Cunningham’s goal is to prove that Judas was psychotic and that insanity was his reason for betraying Jesus. Dr. Freud is in full agreement. As seen in the Mother Teresa scene, El-Fayoumy finds a darker and less honorable side to the witness once again questioning the audience’s views of a predominantly respected historical figure. El-Fayoumy refers to a length of time when Dr. Freud was researching the use of cocaine. He presents to the jury that Freud is an addict and not to be trusted. Freud exits in a flourish of anger, not assisting Cunningham’s case.

El-Fayoumy then calls Caiaphas the Elder, High Priest of the Sanhedrín to the stand. During the questioning El-Fayoumy suggests that Judas initially approached Caiaphas. Caiaphas confirms that he did not approach Judas or any other disciples knowing that they would not help him. “There is an old rabbinical saying, Let them kill you, but do not cross the line” (Guirgis 47). Caiaphas defines crossing the line as, “To betray your ideals. Your conscience. The law”(Guirgis 47). He did not, but submits that Judas did. Cunningham has a difficult start cross-examining Caiaphas because he won’t look at her because of his orthodox beliefs and the fact that Cunningham is a woman. After some prodding from Cunningham he is ready to speak. She feels that he and Judas both hold the blame. Both men in turn handed Jesus over to be crucified and both should accept the consequences of their actions. El-Fayoumy begins to push his case further and flatter his way deeper into his witness’ graces.
Caiaphas snaps and goes on a tirade due to El-Fayoumy’s lack of tact then leaves the courtroom in a rage.

The next testimonial is from Saint Thomas. He addresses the audience about his relationship with Judas. He speaks of his own weaknesses and doubts but of how Jesus still was there for him and willing to prove himself. He states, “I don’t know why I got benefit of my doubt, and Judas didn’t get help with his” (Guirgis 55). He talks of not even liking Judas for many reasons, but there were times when Judas would stand up and be honorable. Thomas talks of his own weakness and questioning, yet Judas was always there for him and Jesus.

Back in the courtroom Cunningham presents surveillance video of Judas attempting to recant to Pontius Pilate. Judas tries repeatedly to recant, but Pilate wants nothing to do with it. Pilate feels that to create peace Jesus must be handed over. After showing the video, Cunningham calls Pilate to the witness stand. As questioning begins, he cites his right to plead the Fifth Amendment. The judge insists that he cooperates, though Pilate avoids any incriminating information. This sends Cunningham down a new line of questioning that leads to a conversation about Pilate holding a high place in office and with this lofty position he had to crucify many men to keep the peace. He had ordered several hundred deaths, yet only washed his hands of Jesus’ crucifixion. Cunningham argues that no one else was able to sentence a man to death so Pilate should take the blame as well. Pilate responds with that he did what he had to do. El-
Fayoumy carefully asks Pilate one question. If Judas had come to recant, does he believe that it was out of true remorse or fear of the consequences he would now have to suffer? Pilate states that he knows true remorse when he sees it and saw none in Judas.

Cunningham then calls Satan back to the stand. He enters in a fit of rage making it next to impossible to continue. As Judge Littlefield attempts to calm him he decides to verbally destroy Cunningham then El-Fayoumy. He then decides to take the stand where he clearly lies and continues to damage the case. He drives Cunningham to a state of utter frustration and turns El-Fayoumy speechless. Littlefield releases him and calls for the next witness.

Outside the courtroom, the figure dressed in white whom comforted Judas’ mother Henrietta, re-enters. He speaks of how he is always there and he is always with us. By now it is understood that he is Jesus. He approaches Judas and for the first time Judas’ catatonic state is broken. Judas continually questions Jesus’ love and of why he has left him. Jesus in turn talks of how he is always there. I find this directly connected to our contemporary situation. People feel abandoned by God and constantly ask for comfort and help, yet don’t necessarily hear back in the way they want. This leads to a loss of faith and ultimately anger. Jesus assures Judas he loves him and is always there, as Judas is rendered catatonic again.
Butch Honeywell, one of the jurors, walks into the space. He approaches Judas and introduces himself. He tells Judas that they have found him guilty and goes to leave. The he stops to have a couple of beers and begins to tell Judas his story. It is an extended, beautifully written monologue. Butch had met the love of his life and married her. However, over the course of one stupid night, Butch ruined everything by cheating on her, betraying her. This story humanizes Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. Butch’s experience mirrors that of Judas’ when he speaks one of the greatest lines in the show, “You cashed in silver, Mr. Iscariot, but me? Me, I threw away gold... That’s a fact” (Guirgis 76).

“Part of Guirgis’ motivation for writing this was his life-long confusion and consternation about the story of Judas—Guirgis did not understand how a loving and forgiving God could consign Judas to hell” (Harelk 4). Being raised Catholic myself and attending Catholic grade school for nine years, the story of Judas Iscariot is one of horrific betrayal to me. I became very sympathetic of Judas due to the way Guirgis humanizes him. I automatically wanted the outcome to play to be in Judas’ favor. Never before would I side with this villainous man as I do now. We learn that Jesus had to do this as part of his mission, so is it possible that Judas had to betray him to help fulfill Jesus’ destiny? Thinking of this in a new direction is fascinating to me.

To further his research Guirgis consulted a Jesuit Priest, Father James Martin. This led to Martin becoming theological advisor to the production. In Father
Martin’s book, *A Jesuit off-Broadway* Guirgis talks of the typical fear of asking priests real questions that might feel wrong to ask. Through the book it is obvious that Father Martin is open and welcome to Guirgis and his questions on faith. In the forward to his book Father Martin speaks of his support for Guirgis and specifically about how he presents this story. He writes, “Guirgis provided a sophisticated theological treatment of the issue, all the slangy (and sometimes foul-mouthed) urban argot for which he is known among theatre aficionados. In this case, the streetwise lingo represented the playwright’s attempt at what theologians call an “inculturation” of the Bible – that is, a translation of the Gospel texts not simply into a different language but for a specific culture” (Martin xvi). Father Martin appreciates how Guirgis, even through “lost faith” reinterprets faith to audiences in a new way. Guirgis writes about and questions faith so well even with his own lack of faith. Father Martin says, “his spirituality – even in the midst of doubt – was always a part of his life, and it became part of his profession” (Martin 23).

Even with the support of Father Martin, LAByrinth’s production of *Judas* had contradicting reviews by its critics. Ben Brantley of the *New Your Times Online* is in favor of Guirgis’ way of telling this story. “Mr. Guirgis is a zealous and empathetic researcher, and he presents dilemmas of ancient Galilee in terms winningly accessible to the 21st century. He also has a genial feeling for anachronism and absurdity. “This is purgatory, Caiaphas,’ the defense lawyer says. ‘I got all day.’ And a stirring sense of Christian existential pain, which
wonders at the paradoxes of faith, surfaces in several ardently acted scenes.”

Brantley finds humor in Guirgis’ intellectual writing style and finds him to be a force within contemporary playwrights. “Mr. Guirgis a playwright to reckon with in recent years: a fierce and questing mind that refuses to settle for glib answers, a gift for identifying with life’s losers and an unforced eloquence that finds the poetry in lowdown street talk.” Brantley is even taken by Guirgis’ way of manipulating where this story is taking place. He is in support of the play being set in purgatory, “To present Cunningham’s case, Mr. Guirgis sets up his own cosmic judicial system, suitable for a contemporary purgatory where, as one character notes, contemplation has been replaced by litigation.”

Although Brantley’s appreciation for Guirgis’ work is apparent, Ana Calhoun of NY Magazine Online disagrees strongly. Her harsh review of the play shows distain for the LAByrinth Theatre Company and Guirgis. Calhoun’s review also has an air of negativity towards Guirgis’ “era-melding” show. “With no one cracking the whip over famed LAByrinth Theater Company procrastinator Stephen Adly Guirgis or his wildly ambitious, era-melding show about a trial in purgatory, at which fifteen actors play roughly twice as many characters from biblical times through the present day, what you get is nearly three hours of chaos.” Honestly I am unsure if it is chaos or information too sophisticated for this reviewer to comprehend. She goes on to add even more of the blame on the plays director. “But too much is just chaos-chaos. Granted, directing Guirgis’ hyperactive plays must be maddening, but Philip Seymour Hoffman, also the
company’s co-artistic director, makes some bizarre staging choices.” Through the eyes of Calhoun the play seems have no redeeming qualities.

Between these two reviews I tend to agree with Brantley’s opinion of Judas. I truly found this to be an interesting story told in a very creative way. I do, however have to agree with Calhoun that the length of the play is problematic. At 2 hours and 40 minutes the runtime is a bit long and drawn out. Some of the questioning in the second act could have been shortened to mirror the length of questioning in the first act.
Chapter 3: The Design Concept

When first reading *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot*, I found the story to be unique in many ways. I was extremely impressed with Guirgis’ ability to construct a piece that approaches and questions the betrayal of Judas Iscariot so deeply, yet is filled with humor and satire all surrounding the complex issue of religious faith. I was left with many thoughts that would affect my own concept of this play and the overall design of the production. Faith, purgatory, judgment and lower class urban culture struck me as initial points of reference.

I believe that faith is the cornerstone of this play. Many of the characters lay their faith on the line in the hope that Judas’ name can be cleared or that he will be sentenced to Hell. For example, Cunningham with her own questionable faith in God and religion puts her faith in Judas and believes that he is worth saving. But is he? She states, “I don’t know that I believe in God” (Guirgis 16). This led me to decide that I should not stress or focus on religion or religious imagery in the design. With various characters lacking faith and so many questions of faith discussed in the play why surround them with religious symbols?

As someone who considers himself to be a “broken Catholic,” I felt that seeing these biblically and historically righteous people shown as all too human was
breathtaking. This revelation made me think that if no one and nothing is perfect, I should show this imperfection in my design. There is imperfection evidenced in the courts and within economic class levels as well. This motivated me to think about time and location. Where is purgatory? Where is judgment taking place and what sort of neighborhood is surrounding them? What is the economic class of the occupants shown in this environment?

I have seen a small number of productions that successfully combine the past and present and inter-mingle the two clearly. Guirgis has accomplished this and therefore I felt the design should reflect the connection. The stage would be a unit set that marries the past and present. I also looked at how quickly the play moves from moment to moment. I prefer to have a flow to my designs specifically within set changes. There shouldn't be massive set changes that interrupt the action. Instead, I felt a unit set that showed a balance of time and space that also allows the characters and scenes to flow through it effortlessly would best suit the play.

Where should this action take place? Guirgis gives the designer the opportunity to take the location in many directions. Through stage direction, the written text and character dialects we are given our path to follow. I instantly had three strong visual impressions from my early reading of the play. Words that described these impressions were biblical, courtroom and urban. These three
images typically wouldn’t be seen together, yet within *Judas* they are somehow merged.

Even with these thoughts, the overall location as described by Guirgis is purgatory. *Newadvent.com* an online Catholic encyclopedia defines purgatory as, “a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God’s grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.” Dramaturg Elizabeth Harelik’s research revealed that there isn’t much more stated of purgatory in the bible or other sources. Beyond this definition there is not solid information on what it looks like. There are artist’s representations, but Guirgis’ purgatory is one that few would imagine. In the play *Gloria*, a messenger from heaven states, “Between heaven and hell there is another place. This place: Hope. Hope is located right over here in downtown Purgatory. Now purgatory, contrary to popular belief, has plumbing and bodegas and they even got a movie theatre and a little park that people can walk their dogs at. Hope – well, it ain’t got none a that, and it definitely don’t smell good” (Guirgis 8). These quotes led me to explore urban settings and ultimately abandoned warehouses as a possible location for our production.

Gloria tells us more about Guirgis’ purgatory when she says, “today, Hope is no longer a place for contemplation – litigation being the preferred new order of the day” (Guirgis 9). We are in a place of judgment; to be even more specific we
spend a majority of the play at a trial. Finding a bond between an urban space and a courtroom was a challenge that led to many design possibilities.

As for the strong biblical nature of the play, I felt it could take a lesser place to these other two themes. Many of the biblical characters are appearing to the audience through abstract circumstances. All of the saints introduce themselves into the world of the play and I feel that allows for their acceptance by the audience. They would also all be dressed in period costumes to assist in defining who they are and where they are from in time.

I was pleased to find many similarities in the approach I was taking in my initial design thoughts for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* with the director’s concept statement. Bohr’s statement did what I feel a well-balanced director’s concept should do. I was given a clear path to follow; yet there was freedom to discover my design and make many of the choices. We were able to easily collaborate to discover this design.

Prior to my first reading of *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* and receiving the director’s formal concept statement, I had brief conversations with Bohr about how he wanted to approach the design for the play. During these early conversations a few key elements struck me. Bohr felt that the sensation of “cold” would be a primary characteristic of purgatory. We discussed if cold would be a temperature, a feeling or something deeper, but we weren’t pin pointing its exact use at this time. Next he felt that Judas needed an isolated spot
on stage. Was Judas imprisoned, banished, or simply removed? Is Judas a primary focus for the audience or cast aside out of the audience’s view? Finally, a majority of the action takes place in a courtroom, so we determined this should be the primary setting.

Beginning my preliminary research here lead me down many routes. I sent Bohr a PowerPoint presentation in early June to start a conversation and to help focus the multitude of directions we could take the show. My initial research on historic representations of purgatory left me uninspired. Paintings from the Renaissance era rendered with their vivid colors and overall warmth and brightness were not characteristics that I was looking for in this design. They didn’t match the design concept Bohr introduced. I then did an image search for Judas, Judas’s betrayal, and Judas’ death. Here I found the first image that struck me in an evocative way.

Figure 1: *The Apostles*, Artist Unknown
This image was haunting, empty and cold, yet there is a sense of warmth and faith in it. Faith is typically represented as blind and this painting shows that beautifully by removing all facial features and replacing them with a cross reminiscent of the crosses Catholics bore on their forehead for Ash Wednesday in preparation for Easter. From there I found many more images connected to Judas and purgatory.

Figure 2: *Judas Hanging*, Universal Pictures Still From *Jesus Christ Superstar*

Figure 3: *The Horde*, by Max Ernst
Figure 4: *The Hanging of Judas Iscariot*, by Mark Sheeky

Figure 4 introduced the idea of creating entrances into purgatory from heaven and hell to my early design thoughts. The saint characters giving testimonials could come from a “heaven” entrance above the stage. Satan could then enter from a separate “hell” entrance on a lower level.

After analyzing the play in conjunction with the director’s concept, I began to expand the scope of my research. As stated earlier, the primary location of the play is a courtroom. Even with many other required locations and vignettes this would be the basis for my design. I researched images of what one would visualize as a classic or historic courtroom and modern courtrooms as well. Although their architectural styles were often different, the following same elements existed within all of them. There was a judge’s bench, specific locations for the prosecution and the defense, a witness stand, court stenographer’s area, the bailiff area and finally, the jury box.
Next I looked more into how I would be translating “cold” to the stage. To be quite literal I researched ice structures. Images of The Ice Hotel and Ice Bar in Quebec Canada (Figure 5) gave me some great ideas. There was a harshness, strength and loneliness to them that could work for parts of the play and the concept, yet there wasn’t the dirt and grunge that Guirgis described in his version of purgatory. At the same time I discovered an installation by Steven Rand named *Thermographic Works* (Figure 6). It had a dark dampness mixed with elements of the ice hotel that struck me, yet it was still too sophisticated and pristine to be purgatory.

Figure 5: Quebec Ice Hotel
As stated earlier in this chapter, Guirgis writes that, “Between heaven and hell there is another place. This place: Hope. Hope is located right over here in downtown Purgatory.” Bohr’s concept states, “Emotional images that keep recurring for me are ones of desperation, of worn and tattered souls, of darkness and cold, of shabbiness and endless use, and primarily, hopelessness” (Bohr Appendix A). This description helped lead me to explore research in a new direction. There is an urban flavor to the definition of this space and in the language used. A weight and desperation affiliated with these areas in the world of today due to economic despair and the collapse of industry connects directly to Judas. It parallels Judas’ or anyone’s loss of hope in purgatory. This led me to begin researching abandoned urban warehouses. Many aspects of these spaces have the grungy cold aesthetic I was searching for as the overall visual look for my design.
This research sparked many conversations between director Bohr and me. At this time in the process I approached lighting designer Matt Hazard to see how he felt about my initial design thoughts, as I wanted to begin getting his input. He asked me to get more solid ideas scenically, particularly if we were considering the use of practical lighting fixtures as a part of the design and to reinitiate a conversation later in the design process. Bohr and I began to meet frequently to bounce ideas off of each other. We had narrowed the scenes down to four specific spaces; the courtroom, a testimonial area, the past, and an isolated area for Judas. Within all these areas there needed to exist elements of the courtroom. In addition, multiple entrances and exits were needed for characters entering from heaven, hell, or the outer courtroom.

The courtroom was the first area to take shape in the design because the majority of the action of the play happens here. I naturally placed the judge’s and witness’ stands upstage of the thrust due to their static nature. These elements needed to be fixed structures that served as key areas of focus in many
scenes yet receded in others without being physically removed. Next I designed the areas for the defense and prosecuting attorneys. In most courtroom dramas seen on television these characters move around the space more than the other participants. They need their desks as a home base, but they are free to approach the judge, witnesses and the jury. Placing them out in the thrust seemed logical. When seated, the actor’s backs could occasionally face the center audience seating area, but since they are mobile, the attorneys could play to the entire room. If their desks were mobile as well they could make for easy transitions in and out of scenes. I had thought of putting in a location for the courtroom stenographer even though one is not spoken of in the play, but Bohr was not interested in adding this character. The bailiff was given a chair located further up stage of the judge. He is part of the story and needs to be in the space, but didn’t need to be in the middle of the action. The last courtroom location decided upon was for the jury placement. I felt that in a way the entire audience served as the jury watching this play, sitting in judgment of the proceedings. If the stage was extended to meet the audience seating area, the jury members could sit there and be a bridge between the two worlds. For the sake of balance, I recommended extending the opposite side of the stage as well. This would add extra space to support the action of the attorneys.

When I first toured the Bowen Theatre I asked which unique locations were used for actor entrances into the theatre. One that was not mentioned was a stairwell from the upper gallery upstage right. I thought at the time that this could
provide a strong entrance given the right circumstance. *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* provided such an opportunity. This stairwell would be our elevated entrance into purgatory from heaven. I envisioned the saints giving testimonials descending the stairs into the main playing area and to walk the stage while speaking.

The scenes from the past would also take place on the stage floor. Whereas the testimonials take place in their own area, outside of the courtroom, moments from the past are stories told by the witnesses. The people in the courtroom are visualizing the vignettes from the past so placing them on the floor allows characters to respond to what they are seeing with ease. The story within the play comes to life for them and can transition back to the courtroom seamlessly.

A location for Judas was still under consideration. Bohr had initially thought of placing Judas on a platform in and above either the house right or left vom. This was to isolate him and not place him in a direct line of sight. There were some difficulties with this location. The platform could not block audience walkways. Also, important interactions take place with Judas, so actors required access and some of the audience would have difficulty trying to see this action. I suggested placing him on a platform above the upstage center doors. He would be out of the scene, but his presence would always be felt. Bohr liked the idea, but was concerned about how the platform would be supported. He did not want to muddle the lower stage space and he didn’t want to visually block Judas and
other characters on the platform. I suggested hanging the platform from the grid using chain (due to its low profile), but was concerned that the chain would create an undesirable medieval look. As an alternative, Chad Mahan suggested aircraft cable as a modern, industrial material that would structurally support a suspended platform and form a very low profile.

Given our limited scenic budget of $1,500 there was a need to consider alternative material choices in several of the design elements. I initially wanted all of the stair treads and supports to be constructed of steel diamond plate stock to match materials often used on fire escapes. I wanted the “Judas platform” to be metal grating. I was looking to use a new material that I hadn’t designed with to date and that I have yet to have seen used on our stages. Unfortunately both of these ideas had to change due to time and budget. The steps were then designed to look like concrete slabs. I found research supporting this new direction and suggested that 2”x12” lumber and a paint treatment be used to keep the treads within budget. We decided to cover the deck of the Judas platform with metal diamond mesh. The diamond metal mesh is a standard metal sheet good often used by OSU theatre that I wanted to avoid, but it fit into the budget. To save more money we decided to paint the existing back wall of the theatre. I initially wanted to line the back wall with Hollywood flats and designed a wall with a cinderblock base, decomposing plaster and multiple windows. Our theatre's back wall is constructed of cinder block that could be found in an industrial warehouse, but has acoustic slits cut into block. As a compromise, we decided to
attach half inch treated blue foam in select areas to look like decomposing plaster. This would cover many of the slits and allow for slightly more texture. The foam could be connected easily and did not need glue to hold it up. We could stay within budget by utilizing the back wall. However we also could not permanently alter the wall in order to support the design.

While researching warehouses the fluorescent lighting always struck me as a great visual element. I presented the idea of adding fluorescent fixtures to the design to Hazard who was instantly onboard. We planned on hanging them over the set and attaching them to the upstage wall. The overhead fluorescents were arranged subtly in the shape of a cross. Hazard initially wanted to light the courtroom with only these lights. As he researched their capabilities further he discovered that it was hard to focus fluorescent lights and this quality would make it difficult to achieve the effect he desired. Due to this I had more freedom in their placement. We also added floodlights to play as emergency lighting over the upstage doors. Although these lights were practical they did not specifically light anything, but acted as set dressing on the large upstage wall.

At the end of act one Satan recalls a chance meeting with Judas at a restaurant called Bathsheeba’s Bar and Grill. Because this was another flashback, Bohr wanted to set this scene in a new location outside the courtroom. After researching a number of images of bars we decided to give this bar a sleek and contemporary feel. I was instantly drawn to images of bars with aluminum
frames and frosted Plexiglas. These two elements look ultra-modern, but I believe them to be harsh and cold as well, complimenting the already defined concept. To enhance its presence Bohr and I suggested that Hazard make the piece light up. Plans were made to have the cables needed to get power to the bar run off stage and be paged by crew when the unit was moved on and off stage. To our surprise Hazard purchased the technology to make the inner lighting of the unit battery powered and remotely operated.

The final area to be designed was the representation of an entrance from hell. Having already established heaven above purgatory and the courtroom, hell needed to appear as if it was below the stage. Unfortunately the Bowen’s stage is a permanent wooden platform on top of a concrete floor that can not be modified with a trap door. Since this is Satan’s only point of entrance, and no other actor uses this entrance, the design team decided that there should be a large visual and aural presence when he enters. Considering that I was already using our existing upstage wall, I decided to use the center metal doors for this entrance. I envisioned the doors slowly creeping open and loudly slamming shut. The platformed deck sits 16” above the theatre floor. This height would allow the Satan to step up into the space as if he were finishing his climb up from Hell.

The next step was to create a solid preliminary scenic design. I felt strongly about many of the decisions we had come to, but I also felt the need to push the
design concept even further. Thinking about making the warehouse the primary visual environment became the basis for designing the rest of the pieces within it. The judge’s bench and witness stand became modified scaffolding. The stairway to heaven took on characteristics of a fire escape to continue the unified industrial theme. The concrete floor had elements reminiscent of sandstone to replicate the desert sands of biblical times.

At the next production meeting the preliminary scenic design was presented. The director and other members of the production staff accepted the overall concept and look, but many details needed to be revisited.

The next step of the process was to create a scenic design package including the final floor plan and section, a detailed quarter inch scale white model, a full set of design drawings and color paint elevations. In this phase I added a large warehouse style window into the Judas area that would be used as a light box to silhouette the acting area, per Bohr’s request. In the meeting I suggested a possible change in the positioning of the fluorescent lighting fixtures overhead to better align them over the attorney’s desk positions. This idea solidified during the rehearsal process and slightly altered the shape of a cross hanging over the proceedings. Hazard was receptive to the change but needed it modified on the final floor plan immediately to confirm that the fluorescent fixtures would not block the position of the lighting instruments in the light plot. I also suggested adding a block and tackle up stage left. There was a bit of a visual dead space in
this area and the heavy hardware fit into the warehouse feeling I was trying to achieve. I also felt that the block and tackle mimicked the noose Judas used to hang himself.

There had been many conversations about sound and music for this production. Once the show was cast Bohr decided that there were enough musicians in the cast to have live sound. Some sound was needed for transition music and other as underscoring. With this choice made a location for these players would need to be designed. In looking at the already designed set there was an open space offstage of the judges stand upstage left. Seeing that there was a large staircase on the opposite side this would help balance the set greatly. To add visual weight to this area I added paint scaffolding behind the musicians to act as a backdrop.

Another important piece of the scenic design was the location of the surveillance video shown in the second act by Cunningham. Here Judas tries to recant to Pontius Pilate. I wanted to make sure to have a voice in where this was placed to harmonize with the style with the rest of the production. After meeting with the production team, including the video's director Phil Garrett, to see what was needed from his perspective, I scouted for a location to photograph the film. My goal was to keep it in the theatre building, but not be a common space that audience members would recognize. Most of the building is in constant use, which made this process difficult. I discovered a corner in the welding shop that
with minor adjustments worked well as a location for the video shoot. Due to scheduling, the film was shot later than planned, but worked out well.

Cunningham shows this video in the second act. Bohr and I discussed what this video would be shown on during this moment. With the understanding that showing this video is part of the scripted action, I felt that treating it as a realistic set-up process within the courtroom and not a theatrical projection that happens “magically” would work best. A pull down projection screen was designed to be attached to the underside of Judas' platform that Cunningham would set up. The bailiff rolled a cart with a projector on it onstage and playback would be controlled by an operator offstage.

Throughout the design process, collaboration was tested. Costume designer Lauren Bush presented research that was solidly connected to the overall concept. Her approach to the design of this show combined with mine worked well together. Due to medical needs, Lauren decided to step away from the show and ultimately leave the graduate program. Although the designs were realized well by resident costume designer Kristine Kearney, I feel that I lost the ability to collaborate with a fellow graduate student and grow as a designer with her. I would have appreciated the chance to see Lauren’s and my relationship grow stronger through designing this thought provoking show.
Chapter 4: The Production Process

Construction began on the first day of the autumn quarter, September 21, 2011 with a deadline date of October 28th for completion of the set for crew watch. Technical director Mahan planned on allowing the cast on stage early in the week of the 28th for spacing rehearsals as long as all scenery was built in time. The scenery was built Monday through Friday from 1:30pm to 5:30pm led by the production’s technical director Chad Mahan, graduate and work-study students, and Theatre 205 and Theatre 220 practicum students. The build went smoothly from my point of view. I acted as the charge scenic artist and was responsible for over-seeing all of the painting for the show. I was given adequate time to paint and sculpt as needed to complete the design.

The first task completed by Mahan was to see if and how we could have a stairway descend from the gallery. Luckily the railing in the gallery had a break in the exact area needed. From there none of the other design choices relied on any of the theatre’s architectural restraints. The platform Judas spent the majority of the show on was the next piece to be constructed by Mahan. The platform was a completely steel structure and as such required welding to construct. Due to our students’ lack of welding experience, Mahan built the piece outside of scheduled shop hours. After planning to rest the upstage side of the
platform on hidden legs, the unit was flown and suspended by ¼" aircraft cable on the downstage side. This platform was the central unit of the design and the rest of the scenery would go in around it. Following completion of the platform unit, the stairway from the gallery began to be constructed. As that piece was in process, the grout lines were being routed into the already existing show floor. Before construction continued I was able to base paint the floor without having to navigate any scenery. The stairway construction was then completed. At this point, a major discussion arose concerning railings on the stairs. Bohr and I initially didn't want any railings, but understood the safety concern with using high platforms without suitable precaution. The decision was made to install railing on the higher sections on the upstage sides of the platform with 1” steel tubing. The downstage sides would consist of railings made from tensioned aircraft cable to create less of a visual obstacle. After seeing the difference between the two railings, Bohr asked for both to match. Foreseeing this request, Mahan had planned for the change and was able to replace the cable with 1” steel tubing with little difficulty.

The next units to be built were the judge and witness stands. As this was in process, I was able to add the foam to the upstage wall and begin to sculpt it. From there the entire back wall was base painted. After doing so I had a minor set back due to a harsh transition exhibited between the foam and wall. Going back into it and shaving the edges of the foam, I was able to blend it into the cinderblocks, which helped to soften the look greatly.
As construction moved forward, the scenic studio built the warehouse window. Previously Matt Hazard had sampled several materials to create panes of glass for the light box. Hazard and I decided to use muslin lined with tissue paper and a distressed gloss paint finish. Mahan attempted to use a distressed cotton fabric when he first constructed the window, but it was not what Hazard and I decided upon and the light source could be seen. Changes were made to return to the original plan and I was able to begin painting the piece. To spatter the window, working with the unit flat on the floor was best. Initially, I had difficulty getting it to the level of distress we were looking for within the design. The carpenters moved it from its high location and back several times due to my lack of painting experience.

At this point scenic construction was complete and only paint needed to be finished. I came in to work multiple evenings and over a weekend to spatter the floor, stairs and platforms. I was unable to get the floor as dark as I wanted. It took multiple spatters and adjusting of tints to get it to its final appearance. I then decided to experiment with some cracked concrete texture on one of the platforms. I had not planned for this addition, but thought it would help aid in the grungy, distressed look the space needed.

The property list initially given to the props master had minimal additions throughout the rehearsal process. All items on the list were displayed in a PowerPoint presentation to make everything as clear as possible. We also had a
meeting to look through the list and images, wherein the property master took notes. Within a week the property master seemed to have forgotten the majority of what we discussed at our meeting. I answered his questions again and left him to prop the production. I gave him more images for new props and suggested exact websites and locations to purchase items. As crew watch approached it was brought to my attention that there were very few rehearsal props and absolutely no show worthy props. I then decided to take a day and assist the property master in collecting the props. Bohr specifically wanted a "magic" martini glass that ignited when Satan lit it. I walked the props designer through a simple way to make it work using flash cotton, paper and string. Within the next two days most of the hand props were in place with few finishing touches needing to be done. Going into technical rehearsals, I asked where the furniture was and unfortunately only a few pieces had been obtained. I quickly designed desks for the two attorneys that Chad Mahan built within an afternoon. By first tech all property items were present and few notes needed to be completed.

Technical rehearsals began on October 31, 2011 with a dry tech. This was planned to be a fairly simple show technically, so the night went smoothly. Our only complex technical moments were a combination of sound, light, fog and doors opening for Satan's entrance. The timing and execution of this critical entrance proved to be difficult. We had hoped that it would tighten up throughout the week.
Due to spacing rehearsals and the detailed dry tech, the first day of technical rehearsals with the actors and crew went well. We were able to sail through the first act as planned. One of our few issues was still Satan’s entrance. It started off well, but ending the cue was difficult due to loud sounds and a lack of light making it hard to signal the crew to shut the doors. At tech table I suggested cue lights, but the technical staff thought more practice would solve the problem. Later to remedy the timing of Satan’s entrance production manager Eric Mayer ultimately purchased a cue light system that cleaned up the cue amazingly well.

Our only other minor issue was with live sound in the space that seemed to be connected to an electric guitar used by one of the musicians. Jim Knapp thought that a live sound mixer would have helped, but it was not part of the process from the beginning and ultimately was not used. Because of this a live mix area has now been added to The Bowen Theatre. Knapp worked days to figure out the issue that seemed to be a faulty connection in the guitar. By first dress these issues were well on their way to being resolved.

During tech the actor playing Judas caught his finger in the diamond mesh lid of the platform that resulted in a minor cut and bleeding. The production team had discussed the potential hazard for sharp edges of this material in production meetings when questions arose as to Judas appearing barefoot. Mahan, aware of the sharpness of this material, had the corners of the mesh ground down, but unfortunately not enough. At tech table Kearney suggested fingerless gloves to
protect Judas’ hands. The gloves were added the next evening. With their help and the actor’s adjustment to movement, the action was deemed safe.

Moving into first preview I finally saw a major defect within the scenic design. The jury box was arranged to have seven seats in it, five less than standard twelve-member group. The issue was that all the members were on the same level, which made it extremely difficult for the four actual audience members sitting there to see much of the action with 3 actors seated in front of them. I approached Rachel Barnes, our box office manager with the concern and she discussed this further with production manager Eric Mayer. Luckily Barnes had thought ahead and held house seats in case this occurred and saved those jury seats as over flow. We were able to remove the four audience jury seats, move the actors playing the jury onto the actual audience risers and use the next raised row of audience seating as part of the jury area.

*The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* opened on November 10, 2011 to a full house and a great response. I witnessed many laughs and a few tears as well as many great conversations about the script and excitement over the cast and the show’s design. It was stated by reviewer Margaret Quamme in *The Columbus Dispatch* that, “The minimalist set, with its open metal stairs and platforms at various levels, gives the play a three-dimensional openness.” This was a seemingly easy run with few notes in rehearsal reports and no need for major fixes or any significant issues in production.
The production closed on November 20, 2011. Strike took place over the next three days that led up to Thanksgiving break. Everything was struck without problems and items that needed to be restored were done so in a timely fashion.
Chapter 5: Evaluation

Being the scenic designer for *The Last Days of Judas Iscariot* was a wonderfully rewarding experience. There were many opportunities to use the skills I have acquired over my years of study at OSU and this project helped me further expand and strengthen my design and production skills. I am ultimately proud of my design work and my collaboration with members of the production team.

From an educational and technical point of view, I feel that designing *Judas* presented many opportunities to overcome challenges I have faced in the last three years while studying at The Ohio State University. In the past, I had been late on most deadlines and additionally I was delivering incomplete work. With *Judas* I met all design deadlines and felt growth as a designer and as a draftsman. The design package consisting of final design drawings, a detailed quarter inch white model, paint elevations, props list and research was complete and presented clearly and on time. I was able to make a model showing more detail than I have on previous projects and paint elevations that defined exactly how I wanted the paint treatment to look.

When I entered the program at OSU, I had no Auto CAD (computed aided drafting) training. I feel that after designing *Judas* I finally have a firm grasp on
many of the complex applications of the program and have created the most solid package of drafting for any production I have designed thus far. The amount of time it takes me to draft and adapt to changes was shortened throughout this process. I was able to utilize shortcuts and a heightened knowledge of Auto CAD to do so. I feel that I am gaining my own techniques and paths to drafting on this program that will make me a stronger designer and assist in my ability to communicate my designs in the future.

Communication with the director played a key role in the success of this design. Jimmy Bohr and I had many meetings to discover the visual aspects of Judas. This was the first project completed while studying here at OSU wherein I had an open, truly collaborative and honest conversation with the director outside of formal production meetings in order to strengthen the design. To maintain collaboration the lighting and costume designers were welcomed into these meetings. Matt Hazard asked to be informed of our ideas but did not attend. Costume designer, Lauren Bush was not in the Columbus area as she had withdrawn from the university by this point.

Art, creativity and ideas cannot be forced, yet that’s how I feel I have realized designs in the past. For this production, I was able to question Bohr and Mahan more as a designer and less as a student. I always have more questions and this time they were all accepted, considered and responded to with a welcoming and free spirit. Bohr’s willingness to accept questions openly and freely made this a
significant learning experience for me. I found this to be very useful in the preliminary phase of my design. I work fast and expansively in my initial design phases with many ideas and research that goes in multiple directions. Bohr accepted this approach and then helped me focus it as well. I was able to get all of my thoughts out and then had the time to let them incubate and evolve. There was a balance of collaboration between designer and director that I had never experienced before. From the beginning, Bohr’s beautifully stated director’s concept led me down a creative, welcoming and educational path.

I found some great successes within this design. The entrance from heaven was one of my favorite design choices in this production. Beyond being a unique entrance, it was solely one of my own ideas that I was able to see realized. It led me to design the entrance from hell and the arrangement of most other scenic elements in the space.

The process of the design’s realization was a new experience and area of growth for me that I had never practiced before now. In order to budget the show properly, the staircase from heaven underwent drastic visual and structural changes. In the past, I felt removed from these decisions due to my own lack of maturity as a designer. For this production, technical director, Chad Mahan and I collaborated to identify possible cost savings while still maintaining the look I wanted. I was very pleased with our open, candid and cooperative conversations.
An open space was utilized within this design in two ways. When designing in the Bowen’s thrust space I have typically tried to pull visual weight down stage and not place all of the major scenic pieces upstage. Also in my past designs, the downstage area or “tongue” of the thrust was utilized to accommodate more actors to fill its openness. With *Judas* there were primarily two actors in the space at any given time, yet with their constant movement, these actors filled the empty space and brought it to life. Secondly, designs in this space often use masking in the upstage and offstage areas to help focus the action and mask backstage entrances. I decided to not mask the backstage area and let its enormity and depth be part of the design. The Bowen Theatre has a vast warehouse feel that lends itself to the concept we were trying to achieve and could be easily manipulated to become a part of the design. I also felt that soft goods would adversely soften the effect I was trying to create. I have attempted to expand this space in the past, but it is difficult for directors to block within and challenging for lighting designers to light with the standard inventory in Bowen. Bohr’s faith in the idea and strength as a director allowed him to use the extra space wonderfully. Matt Hazard was able to light the extra space because *Judas* was our only on campus show in production and this allowed him access to more of the lighting inventory. He was able to use lighting instruments from the Thurber Theatre to allow this sense of vastness to function as designed. The Thurber Theatre is the theatre department’s proscenium space located adjacent to the Bowen in the Drake Performance and Event Center.
Another great success was the intermingling of the courtroom and warehouse spaces into one. The two have no natural common bond, yet adapting the courtroom areas with the aesthetic of warehouse items blended well to support the story. Both spaces on their own have so much visual strength and I wanted to find the key features of each to bring to this design.

Finally, I found that the use of levels were key to this design. The story and length of the play can be flat and static as written. Being set in one area for an extended time also contributes to that liability. I wanted to find levels that support the concepts of a conventional courtroom, the judge’s bench and witness stand heights above the court floor. I would also connect to the mythical natures of highs and lows, heaven and hell and the undefined spaces such as Judas’ platform and the testimonial ledge called for in the script. Finding separation and distinction within a flow and continuity of levels was a success within this design. For example, during testimonials, actors in the court could co-exist on stage and be separate due to levels and focus with lighting. Then, following the actor giving the testimonial, lights could transition back to the court with the actors playing attorneys ready to continue.

I was left slightly dissatisfied with the collective collaboration of the design team in conjunction with the director’s concept. Conceptually there was a disconnection between the sets, costumes and lighting due to a lack of communication. I would have liked to have brought the design team together
more to further discuss the concept. At meetings we all kept saying, “I got it”, but that wasn’t true. The loss of our initial costume designer was another obstacle in the process. Bush’s designs were taken to the extreme as far as being tattered and aged. I would have liked to have seen how she would have followed through and realized her design. In Bohr’s concept statement he spoke of a cold, tattered and distressed space with a harsh overall look. I thought that it would be great for us to take it to a heightened level of destruction and filth by adding more texture overall, but we did not reach it, in my opinion. I presented these thoughts to Bohr late into technical rehearsals; he counseled me that I should have aired these concerns earlier in the process.

I feel that the weakest area of my scenic design was in the painting. I was pleased to have acted as charge artist for the first time on this design, but did not truly have enough knowledge in the field to enhance the design. In my opinion, nothing on the set had dimension, texture or faux reality through the paint. As I complete this year and continue painting, I am now learning multiple techniques and finishes that could have given my design the look it needed. I did not know of different techniques and products to assist with this. The concrete slab platforms should have had a physical texture to strengthen the look of a truly textured, used and weathered concrete. Multiple layers of paint on the Styrofoam faux plaster could have been avoided with a simple Van Dyke brown glaze applied in the proper way. The large window behind Judas should have been treated to look even more dirty and neglected. Peeling paint and rusted
corners would have helped define the window greatly. Finally the floor had little
definition under the lighting and was completely washed out for much of the
audience. This was especially true from the two side sections where reflected or
“bounce” light can be an issue. I painted an elevation that was deeper and
darker, but couldn’t get the floor to match it. I now see that the paints I mixed
needed more saturated pigment to match my research and elevation. Multiple
spatters were added, yet did not correct the problem. These sprays were too
watery and light in color to majorly affect the hue. Luckily I was able to have
actual grout lines cut into the stage floor. These lines helped break up the floor
so it was not a complete washout.

Finally I feel that I overcame one of my known weaknesses that ultimately lead
to inconsistencies, which was my ability to openly speak my mind
inappropriately or at random. I understand that there is a difference between
candidly speaking your mind and productive sharing of information and ideas.
This requires the ability to edit and carefully consider what you are about to say.
This may feel restrictive, but it is necessary for effective collaboration. I have the
ability to make a comment sound rude and completely out of context when I
have no sense of insincerity in my thoughts. I need to collect my thoughts, pause
and respond with a well-structured comment that is necessary and constructive.
This is a skill that I am working on and will continue to develop throughout my
career.
Scenery was the only area to go over budget. The combination of scenery and paint was $700 over our $1,500 budget. There were multiple factors that contributed to this overage. I met with Mahan to find his opinion on this. We both agreed on the following areas. First, $1,500 is a small amount to have when only designing on the main area of the thrust. Opening up the space and using the entire upstage wall added cost. If the entrance from heaven had been cut we would have been under budget. It was a long path and took a large amount of materials to construct. Secondly, we thought that using the upstage wall would help as well, but the amount of paint needed to base, texture and restore it added up quickly.

Ultimately I am glad that I was able to be a member of the Last Days of Judas Iscariot design team. I will take away a firmer grasp of collaboration from witnessing its strengths and weakness during this process. Working with a contemporary playwright’s script that questioned faith in such deep and meaningful ways was a reward in itself. The ideas evoked in Judas could have been realized in many marvelous ways and I appreciated everything the script had to offer.
Appendix A: Director’s Concept
The Last Days of Judas Iscariot
By Stephen Adly Guirgis
DIRECTOR’S CONCEPT
Submitted by Jimmy Bohr June 28, 2011
The Ohio State University Department of Theatre

Dramatic Action and World of the Play

The dramatic action of ...Judas is the playing out of the trial that is convened to re-try Judas Iscariot’s condemnation to Hell for his betrayal of Jesus and his ultimate suicide. This trial and the courtroom where it takes place, as unorthodox as they may be, are the frame for the telling of this story. It is the trial that dictates the structure (with the calling of witnesses, cross-examinations, recesses, etc.) and this courtroom, in Hope Purgatory, dictates the world of the play. Purgatory is a place familiar, yet totally unknown, to all of us. Ask anyone to describe Purgatory and you will get as many different answers as people you ask. There are no real references to Purgatory in the Bible. It is only mentioned in early Christian writings, and then only really as a state of being, not a concrete place as clearly defined as heaven and hell. We know those two places well. They have been imagined and rendered throughout Christian history in great detail in art and literature. But Purgatory is a mystery. Gloria, an angel in the play who sits on the jury, states “Purgatory, contrary to popular belief, has plumbing, and bodegas, and they even got a movie theatre and a little park that people can walk their dogs at...and it definitely don’t smell good.” Hope is in
“downtown Purgatory”. So we are left with truly a blank slate for this courtroom and this world. In all references to this state of Purgatory, the one constant seems to be a place to wait. It is an “in-between place” between heaven and hell that is a place of waiting and reflection. Yet we have a very lively and boisterous trial happening in this place of waiting and reflection. Despite its name, Hope, it appears to be a place of hopelessness. People have been stranded here for hundreds and thousands of years without any hope of getting out. So how do we image this place? Emotional images that keep recurring for me are ones of desperation, of worn and tattered souls, of darkness and cold, of shabbiness and endless use, and primarily, hopelessness. This is a world of perpetual waiting. The play considers the conflict between divine mercy and human free-will. If God is an all-merciful God, why was Judas condemned to Hell?

**The Style, Structure and Tone**

The style of *Judas* is a non-linear narrative and story-telling. It utilizes flashbacks, direct address to the audience, traditional realistic scenes, freezes, and video elements. The action flows freely from the courtroom to characters’ direct address to flashbacks and back without any interruption. The style of this very contemporary piece demands easy flow between numerous realities.

The structure of the play centers on the trial, so the courtroom has to be the primary space. The trial is between God and the Kingdom of Heaven and Earth and Judas Iscariot. The basic trial structure, calling witnesses, cross-
examinations, addresses to the jury, etc. gives the play its forward motion and
dictates the structure of the play. But there are also other “empty” spaces, a place
where Judas resides, a bar, an interrogation room, and perhaps an entrance from
heaven and one from hell. There is a scripted intermission that is built into the
trial. The tone of this play is very different at different times. It is at times
reverent and contemplative, at times contentious and irreverent, at times
raucous and hilarious. The entire production needs to remain nimble and lean to
be able to cross all these boundaries easily and instantly.

Production Considerations

As stated, the courtroom is the primary place of the play. Yet, is it a traditional
“Law and Order” courtroom, as we know it? Being in Purgatory, I’m not sure.
Nevertheless, we need places for the judge, the jury, the witnesses, and the
lawyers to be. We also need the place or places for all the “testimonial” speeches
to happen, and also the bar for the end of Act 1, and the place for Judas that also
accommodates Jesus, Butch and Satan. I would like Judas to be present for the
entire play, so his “space” will have to exist with the courtroom. I would love to
see an entrance from Heaven from above and from Hell below, to really define
this as the “in-between” place. What’s most important to me about the set is that
we have free access to transition from one reality to the other with no
interruption. The action never stops until the intermission or the end of the play.
So all realities co-exist, or transition seamlessly. I encourage a very non-
traditional thinking about the Bowen space, and including the audience in as
much of the action as possible. The lighting for ...Judas will need to help us
transition easily from one reality to another. As with the set, I urge very non-
traditional thinking about the lighting. Perhaps we could use "real" light, as
fluorescents or some other kind of real overheads for the courtroom, and then
very dramatic "stage" lighting for the scenes and testimonials. I think the
courtroom should have a very real and unpleasant harshness, while the scenes
and testimonials are theatrical and fitting to the moment. They can be as
dramatic as we want them to be, in contrast to the reality of the court. The
costumes need to be as diverse as the people who inhabit the play. I think for
some of the historic characters, such as Mother Teresa, Freud, and Caiaphas we
need to keep them in historically accurate and recognizable clothes. For other
characters, such as Judas and Jesus and Satan, contemporary clothes seem
appropriate. (And Gloria, one of the jury, is an angel with wings.) I think we'll
have to consider each character individually as to whether they are in period or
contemporary clothes. Since Purgatory has existed forever, people need to be in
what they showed up in. I think it is one of the strengths of the play that all these
periods can coexist simultaneously. I would like to use only live music, if
possible. I will try to see what musicians are in the cast and go from there. I can
see many moments that would be enhanced by music, but recorded music feels
very wrong for this production. There is a "surveillance" video in Act 2 of Judas
with 3 soldiers and Pontius Pilate. I would like to film this scene and show it in
the course of the action. This will have to be shot after we are cast, but before we
go into tech. And we will have to have the appropriate set and costumes for the shoot. There will also have to be somewhere in the courtroom to show the video. The original production of the play used extensive double-casting. The script even accommodates for the double-casting. I would like to not double-cast, if possible, to give as many students as possible an opportunity to be in production. The actors cast as the 3 soldiers in the video would also be cast in other roles in the production. The casting is wide open in terms of race and gender, and I hope to have as diverse a cast as possible. There are scripted roles for 17 men and 7 women.

Some Final Thoughts

This is a play about faith. It questions the nature, and the very existence, of God and His relationship to Man. It is at times irreverent and shocking, but at its heart it is a true and sincere questioning of what it means to try to be “good” and genuinely ourselves. These are big and intensely personal questions with no easy answers. Whenever you put the character of Jesus onstage, in whatever manner, there is sure to be controversy. I have already spoken to our dramaturge and we are planning very detailed study-guides and lobby displays, as well as program notes and on-line information to help put the play in context and to focus the experience on the real questions of the play and not hysterical reactions. We would like to do some critically led discussions about these large, contentious issues.
This play is extremely personal for me. It strikes many familiar chords and asks questions I’ve long been afraid to ask. I hope that will be true of every person working on the production, and every person seeing it. But I think we all need to be prepared for some extreme reactions. These topics always arouse strong passions. I look forward to those discussions, and won’t shy away from raising those difficult questions.

Stephen Adly Guirgis states in his forward to the play: “It’s not about joining a team or a church or choosing sides or learning a prayer. It’s not about man-made concepts of good and evil. It’s not about doing “enough” or “too little.” It’s not about shame and guilt. It’s about You. It’s about the collective Us. Thomas Merton said, “To be a saint means to be myself.” What if that were true?

What is it that we need to overcome in order to be truly “Ourselves”? I won’t pretend at all that this play answers that question, but if it provokes the question in you, then please let it. Ponder it. Because we need you.”

Let’s look deep, and provoke those questions.
Appendix B: Visual Research
Plate 1. Research: Interrogation Room

Plate 2. Research: Warehouse and Wall Treatment
Plate 3. Research: Evocative and Wall Treatment

Plate 4. Research: Lighting and Wall Texture
Plate 5. Research: Stairs

Plate 6. Research: Wall Texture
Plate 7. Research: Light Up Bar
Appendix C: Drafting and Paint Elevations
Plate 8. Drafting: Ground Plan

Plate 9. Drafting: Judas Plate 1
Plate 12. Drafting: Judas Plate 4

Plate 13. Production Photo: Floor Paint Elevation
Plate 14. Production Photo: Wall Paint Elevation
Appendix D: Production Photos
Plate 15. Production Photo: Pre-Show

Plate 16. Production Photo: Gloria Explaining Purgatory
Plate 17. Production Photo: Henrietta on the Stand

Plate 18. Production Photo: Testimonials By St. Peter and St. Matthew
Plate 19. Production Photo: Cunningham and El-Fayoumy Argue

Plate 20. Production Photo: Satan’s Entrance
Plate 21. Production Photo: Bathsheeba’s Bar and Grill

Plate 22. Production Photo: Surveillance Video Shoot
Plate 23. Production Photo: Surveillance Video

Plate 24. Production Photo: Final Scene. Butch and Jesus Visit Judas
Appendix E: A Review by The Columbus Dispatch
Theater Review | ‘The Last Days of Judas Iscariot’: Exploration of religious questions proves both comic, poignant
OSU production has verve, energy, but could be trimmed from 3 hours

By: Margaret Quamme

_The Last Days of Judas Iscariot_ gets a lot of mileage out of questions that have bothered Christians for centuries: Who is to blame for the death of Jesus, and what was the fate of the disciple who betrayed him? Stephen Guirgis’ two-act play doesn’t arrive at surprising new answers to these questions, but it opens them up in both fiercely comic and quietly poignant ways.

The play is set up as a trial of Judas (Kyle Rutkowski) in a courtroom in a version of purgatory that looks much like an abandoned warehouse. In front of petulant, impatient Judge Littlefield (Zachary Owens), feisty, bedraggled attorney Fabiana Cunningham (Ashley Rae Kobza) argues Judas’ case, while smarmy, seedy Yusef El-Fayoumy (Alex Boyles) takes the opposing side.

During the proceeding witnesses, including a questionably ethical Mother Teresa (Liz Light), a prim Sigmund Freud (Andy Anderson), and a show-stealing Satan (John O.S. Houston). Judas himself spends much of the play seated on a platform above the action, arms around his knees and head lowered.

At three hours, there is some trimming. Guidry sometimes tries to squeeze too much historical research on the time period into the proceedings and goes out of his way to allow each character long speeches in which to justify his actions. An extended monologue...
at the end of the play seems anticlimactic. But the Ohio State play under Jimmy Bohr's direction, has enough verve and energy to make what could have been a relatively static and talky play thoroughly engaging, and it finds a nice rhythm between courtroom scenes in which the Marx Brothers would have felt at home and more-quiet, reflective ones in which the apostles reflect on their experiences with Judas.

Kobza and Boyd's relationship, which the ever-confident El-Fayoumy, with his elusive grasp of English diction, sees as sexually charged. The format, in which new characters are introduced at regular intervals, allows for diverting set pieces by Kelsey Caitlin Bates as an assured and street-wise St. Monica and Cornelius Hubbard Jr. as a combative Pontius Pilate.

The minimalist set and platforms at various levels, gives the play a three-dimensional openness.

It's not always clear why costume designer Lauren Bush sometimes outfits her players in period garb and sometimes in contemporary costumes. The contemporary ones work better to reveal the characters' idiosyncrasies. This raucously profane and provocative version of a well-known story might shock a few viewers, but it ultimately doesn't so much challenge Christianity as affirm its deeper values.
Works Cited


