

Lighting Plot and the Realisation of Production Objectives in *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*

Coleman Abasifreke Christopher*
Department of Performing Arts
Akwa Ibom State University,
Obio Akpa, Nigeria.

Abstract

Lighting plot is basically considered by theatre practitioners as the blueprint that outlines the expected lighting fixtures for a given performance. It is a road map that shows the locations of the lighting equipment; a scale mechanical drawing and also regarded as a fundamental component in stage productions, serving as a blueprint that outlines the specific arrangement and operation of lighting fixtures throughout a performance. This study aims at exploring the role of lighting plot in the realization of production objectives in Amah Inimfon's direction of Emotan: The Benin Heroine. Leaning on the frameworks of Stanley McCandles Lighting Theory which details the concepts and techniques of lighting as it advances the thematic concerns of a production; this paper adopts qualitative research design to interrogate issues of lighting plot in the concerned theatre production. It argues that lighting plot plays a pivotal role in actualizing production objectives in theatre practice and a thoughtfully crafted lighting plot is indispensable for the realization of identified production objectives. The study submits that meticulous planning and placement of lighting fixtures can be effectively achieved through strategic utilization of the lighting plot and designers can further their relevance through collaboration with director and other personnel of the production team.

Keywords: Benin Heroine, performance, Amah Inimfon, communication, Lighting Plot.

Introduction

Lighting plot is within the realm or scope of a lighting designer in theatre arts practice. In this perspective, Iyorza and Iseyen explain that “the controversy surrounding the value of arts within the society has continued to create a divide among scholars ..., arts is not just a mere imitation..., but also a reality that is representative and therapeutic to the society” (40). Ekeke adds that, “communication has been globally recognised and accepted as a key vehicle for heralding change in various societies” (89). Lighting plot being within the scope of lighting design is thus a medium of communication.

* Corresponding Author: Coleman Abasifreke Christopher

Email: colemanjnr1999@gmail.com

Received: 27 March. 2025; Accepted: 7 April. 2025. Available online: 30 April. 2025.

Published by SAFE. (Society for Academic Facilitation and Extension)

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Based on the above assertions, lighting plot could be regarded as a fundamental component in stage productions, serving as a blueprint that outlines the specific arrangement and operation of lighting fixtures throughout a performance. In line with this standpoint, Ekpe and Thompson assert that performances “does not develop in a vacuum, they are given impetus, shape, and direction by the technical factors” (98). This document not only details the types of lights used but also their placement, intensity, colour, and timing. The lighting plot is super important in making sure the production achieves its goals. It sets the mood, directs attention and creates the right atmosphere for the audience. By providing a clear visual representation of the lighting design, the plot facilitates effective communication among the production team, ensuring that all members understand how lights enhance the overall artistic vision. It is an essential tool for both designers and technicians in creating a cohesive visual narrative that leads to the actualisation of production concept because according to Jacob, “every theatrical production has a concept” (137).

The lighting plot is a scale mechanical design that serves as a road map for the placement of the lighting equipment. The United States Institute for Theatre Technology (USITT) states that “although there is no universally accepted style of drafting light plots, some general information must always be included” (351). This study aims at exploring the role of lighting plot in the realisation of production objectives in Amah Inimfon’s direction of *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*. It positions that depicting the light plot's main objective is to show where all of the lighting equipment utilized in the production is located. Thus, an effectively executed lighting plot not only supports but amplifies thematic elements within a performance.

Overview of Lighting and Lighting Design

According to Rosenthal and Wertenbaker, “man first acknowledged the existence of his soul by worshipping his sources of light, the sun and the moon. With this discovery, man began to master his environment and with firelight, the history of lighting design or artificial illumination began” (82). In corroboration with the above assertion, Jacob avers that, “literature from inception has remained a predominant means of eliciting exhilarations and the sublime appreciation of man’s inner sensation towards nature and the world around him, just as it has been a means of expression of inner thoughts and feelings” (123). To justify this notion, Rosenthal and Wertenbaker report that “primitive man started to worship the firelight which was his source of light. At night, he told stories of his daytime exploits, sitting near a burning fire with his source of light and worship casting shadows on his enactments; and so, began the history of illumination” (72). Wilson, however, describes lighting design as a component of the

new theatre language that aims to innovate the contemporary theatre. He adds that “lighting can be a connector of separate elements” (17). This is the case because, during performance, lighting design serves as a unifying factor and incorporates disparate components, including the body and props, into the stage image.

The Roles of Lighting Plots in Various Production Genres

The lighting plot plays crucial roles in stage productions, serving as a blueprint for the intricate interplay of light and shadow that shape the audience's experience. According to Shimizu, “effective lighting design is integral to artistic expression, as it enhances the narrative by establishing mood, highlighting key moments, and guiding audience attention” (12). The careful selection of colour and intensity not only complements the storyline but also evokes emotional responses that deepens engagement with the performance. Lighting plot facilitates collaboration among various production elements. When paired with other performance elements, lighting can either have a significant impact on an audience or go entirely unnoticed. The lighting plot can be adjusted in a variety of ways to achieve the desired look, making it a flexible tool. Lights have direction, shape, intensity, distribution, quality, mobility, and the ability to change over time in addition to combining colours. When these components are combined, an audience may experience particular feelings, and this is interesting because theatrical “products have proven valuable tools for engaging and analysing human concerns” (Ekpe and Wekpe 130). To find out how much lighting can affect an audience's emotions, creative opportunities in this area should be investigated. As Yumer and Fatahalian indicate, lighting “designers face challenges in creating visually compelling lighting due to limitations in current tools. A well-structured lighting plot enables designers to iterate efficiently on their ideas while ensuring alignment with other production aspects such as set design and sound” (16). Louis asserts that, “in addition to identifying the type, wattage, and electrical assignment given to each instrument and device, the graphic light plot specifies their location in the performance space and allocates a unique identity to each unit” (45).

Theoretical Framework: Stanley McCandles Lighting Theory

Stanley McCandless propounded the four basic lighting concepts in 1930. This theory detailed the concepts and techniques of lighting as it advances the thematic concerns of a production. This involves dividing the stage into several sections for the purposes and characteristics of the lighting, and the most crucial element is the angle at which the performers are lit by the

designer. These concepts are called "lighting the acting area, blending and toning, lighting background and creating effects" (McCandless, 33-105).

The basic concepts of McCandless lighting theory are:

- **Lighting the acting areas:** Acting areas are "those spaces on the stage where specific scenes are played." (Gillette, 301). The main purpose of the lighting in the acting areas is to provide the actor's face with sufficient yet varying visibility. The plane of illumination is, therefore, generally considered at this level (McCandless, 33).
- **Toning and Blending:** In McCandless theory, the stage's mixing and tone lighting are intended for a broad, shadowless dispersion of colour and intensity. According to McCandless, "a large bank of lights with a large diffusing screen covering them would give a better distribution than strip lights do, because strip lights give general distribution only along one axis" (34).
- **Background lighting:** Background lighting constitutes an important item for consideration in McCandless's theory. This is due to the fact that the actor and the primary elements of the scene should always take precedence over the surroundings. According to him, background lighting "should aim at carrying a suggestion of place and time which stirs the imagination rather than to delineate sharply"(36).
- **Creating Special Effects:** Here is where special tools are employed to create the illusion of sunlight, moonlight, lamplight, firelight, etc., in order to act as motivating sources. According to McCandless, "these special effects are to emphasise a particular position on the stage by the use of a special acting area light. Entrances are apt to be more important dramatically than the general acting space so that it is often desirable to emphasise the actor's face as he enters and leaves the stage. This emphasis must be accomplished with special instruments" (103-104).

The adaptability of this theory was necessitated by its relevance in the production of *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*. The theory's flexibility in stage productions enhances the usual thematic and environmental concerns in it using the lighting plot. This was achieved by illuminating the acting area, distinguishing the actors from the background, creating effects as well as showing the object in focus. All these put together advanced the realistic impression of the events being portrayed in the play.

Overview of *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*

Emotan: The Benin Heroine by Irene Isoken Salami is a historical play that centres around Emotan, an influential woman in the 15th Century Benin Kingdom, a revered figure in Benin history. According to Bassey “revolutionary plays that tackle socio-political themes have a long history” (106). The play recounts the life and heroic deeds of Emotan, a courageous woman who played a significant role in the resistance against foreign invaders and internal oppression in the ancient Benin Empire. Through her bravery, resourcefulness, and leadership, Emotan is celebrated as a symbol of strength and resilience throughout Benin kingdom. After she informs him of a murderous plot against him by Uwaifiokun and a few chiefs during his exile, Emotan plays a crucial role in Ewuare's return to the throne as Oba of Benin. Ewuare is appointed Emotan of the Iyeki, a role that entails monitoring security issues and implementing market regulations. Following Emotan's passing, Oba Ewuare immortalizes her by directing the sacred Uruhe tree be planted in the same location where she had showcased her goods. He also directed that every person that enjoys events celebrated, accord respect to Emotan. Emotan’s significant impact as a Benin historical heroine and her immense contribution to her community are elaborated examined in the play. Additionally, her earned victories and challenges are also addressed.

Mood Creation and Aesthetics through Lighting Design

Lighting design influences aesthetics and mood creation in theatrical performances. In the performance at the centre of this study, lighting design was used in situating the play’s tone and also defining emotion. Also, in establishing the difference between day and night, the light designer used Fresnel light. He also used high intensity Fresnel to establish the tension between two characters (Chief Oliha and Iyase) while they were arguing.

Application of light with variations created through colour, intensity and light types, has the capacity to influence audience’s discernment and passion involvement. The trajectory recorded in the trend of lighting evolution has afforded designers the ability to adopt and adapt with diversity. In a bid to achieve aesthetic artistic experience, designers coopt components that reflect the basic properties of the play such as the theme and character portrayal. Aside from the aesthetic effect, light has evolved to be considered an essential element that defines stories; thus, it does not only enhance visibility but frames how we perceive the story. The Stage lighting used in *Emotan: The Benin Heroine* did not only highlight actors but also reinforced the narrative's emotional undertone which audience members could relate with while watching the production. By considering factors such as content and theme, the lighting

designer created an immersive experience that resonates with audiences on multiple levels. Thus, making effective stage lighting indispensable for elevating performances and enriching viewer's engagement. All these were made possible through the aid of a workable lighting plot for *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*.



Prince Ogun's reaction on being banished from the Palace and from the land.

Source: AKSU FEST, 2024.



Chief Oliha in a heated argument with Chief Iyase

Source: AKSU FEST, 2024.

The images above establish that the lighting designer used light to situate the mood in the production of *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*. Prince Ogun's banishment from the land shows the act of betrayal and the lighting designer used light to establish the tension and the period of which the action took place. This conforms with Salzberg's assertion that, "if the audience

cannot see the actors, everything else the lighting designer does is a waste of time” (312). Research has indicated that visibility has an impact on our comprehension of spoken language. When Chief Oliha got into a heated argument with Chief Iyase, the mood established by the actors is chaos as Chief Oliha and Chief Iyase are not in agreement on the banishment of Prince Ogun. Chief Oliha opposes the banishment while Chief Iyase supports the decision of the Oba after he pressurises the Oba into making this ridiculous decision. The lighting designer uses the lighting fixtures to achieve this feat, allowing the audience to feel the tension of the chaos caused the two characters on stage. In a seeming tandem, Gillette submits that, “creating mood with light is one of the easiest and, at the same time, most difficult aspects of stage lighting” (349). He adds that “it is relatively easy to create a spectacular sunset effect or a sinister feeling of lurking terror; the difficulty comes in integrating these impressive effects with the other elements of the production. Effective stage lighting is subtle and rarely noticed” (349). Even while it's entertaining to create mood, time, or other stunning visual displays in a theatrical production, many plays simply do not have the chance to do so. Stage lighting is typically intended to subtly improve the play's mood within the confines of the production concept. Beyond only being utilitarian, lighting design has the ability to change and improve spaces and have an impact on our safety. In theatre shows, appropriate lighting may create a welcoming environment that encourages work and relaxation.

The Influence of Lighting on Audience Perception

The influence of lighting on audience perception is profound, shaping emotional responses and interpretations in various contexts. In theatrical productions, the direction, intensity, and colour of lighting are crucial elements that can evoke specific emotions and enhance storytelling. Morehart submits that, “lighting choices can manipulate audience emotions by creating distinct moods” (12). The lighting designer in the production under review used warm colours when the women came to celebrate and welcome the new Oba on seat. Using the Fresnel light with high intensity of light. The audience members felt relaxed enjoying the dances performed on stage by the actors.

An understanding of the role of lighting in visual media emphasises the need for content creators to strategically employ luminance variations to guide audience focus and emotion, ultimately enriching the viewing experience. The backlights' placement is crucial since it has the power to enhance or detract from the viewing experience. Improperly positioned backlights can reflect light straight into the audience, making it impossible for them to enjoy the show.

Contrarily, when properly placed, it can help to differentiate characters from the background while also making them more dynamic, creating a versatile experience.

It is rewarding to commit time and embrace skill mastery in light designing. This is because such can help achieve enhanced artistic creation. An instance could be drawn from how light can be used to create silhouette and increased theatrical anticipation. Additionally, incorporating techniques such as uplighting can create an ethereal ambiance, casting elongated shadows and adding depth to the scene, which further enriches the audience's visual experience. In addition to mastering the different types of light that could be used to achieve varying effects, it is also important to understand how positioning and angling gear contribute to delivering light effect functions. Overall, accurate application can lead to a more enchanting experience for the audience

Lighting Plot and the Realisation of Production Objectives in *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*

The lighting plot is an essential component in the realisation of production objectives in performing arts. As asserted by Jacob, “performance and performing arts are concepts that share same etymological foundation because they have to do with the process of doing something that is essentially useful” (147), serving as a blueprint that guides the effective use of light to enhance storytelling and audience engagement. As highlighted by Shimizu, “lighting is not merely about illumination; it is a powerful tool for creating atmosphere and conveying emotional depth. A well-structured lighting plot ensures that every element of the production aligns with its artistic vision, allowing for a cohesive experience that captivates the audience” (14). It is imperative for a lighting designer to draft his lighting plot before the commencement of a theatrical production. This will guide him and his crew members on how to place the lighting equipment and at the same time not blocking the audience’s view. The lighting designer also must work on his scene-by-scene division, which he collaborates with other technical areas like the sound, costume, makeup, set design etc to share ideas and also to discuss on the colour selection of each of the areas to be used. The lighting designer must also hold meetings with the director to discuss the lighting fixtures he will be using for the production so as to achieve the production objectives.

The lighting designer could then proceed to use his selected lighting fixtures on the production day to achieve his goal and help the director pass the intended message to the audience. This innovation not only simplifies complex designs but also enhances collaboration among production team members, ensuring that the final output meets both aesthetic and practical goals. Evolving technology has indeed influenced the field of lighting; this has enhanced lights

ability to convert a plain stage to an aesthetic delight. This emphasises the need for designers to better determine the use of lights to create mood and structure narratives. One of such ways in ensuring desired result is getting a lighting plot that reflects desired effect. This blueprint, if well designed can contribute to production success and also translate to increased audience satisfaction.

The lighting plot has a dual function of supporting technical efforts and streamlining such contributions as well as supporting creative structure. It comes very relevant when light is to be used in any performance. When executing, the regulation of colour, intensity and direction can further promote its function and define the pathway to success. Also, working with a lighting plot, helps improve communication within the team because there its acts as a relatable guide that supports actions and spells out what is expected of the team. According to Evan Shimizu, "it is common for designers to gather images that represent potential design ideas at the beginning of a lighting design project" (4). This is applicable to both still and motion pictures as it helps to tell the story in a more convincing and realistic way. Lighting can be used to stir emotions, create highlights as well as attract attention. It can be employed to create magical moments and interpret actions, supporting the assertion that every performance has an underneath story.

A significant factor in stage productions that can affect meaning making is the weaving together of scenes. It is concerned with how the performance flows from one scene to another and it emphasises that there should be a considerable degree of syncing so that the performance can be presented as a unified whole. Lighting application can help bridge the gaps in scene change, allowing for the unique flow of one scene into another. The overall effect extends to the comprehensive and enchanting experience that unfolds on stage.

It is sufficient to assert that lighting plot helps in the realisation of production objectives as exemplified with *Emotan: The Benin Heroine*. In applying evolving technology to what is obtainable on stage, it is important to note how light can intersect with images and even objects. This will ensure smooth application and achievement of desired result. This study also calls on designers to imbibe effective communication with other team members of the production so ideas can have collective interpretation and responsibilities do not crash against others. For this reason, a well-articulated lighting plot comes relevant as it could help communicate ideas and guide execution.

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