

# Example of history of visual effects literature review

[Literature](#), [William Shakespeare](#)



## Literature

### Introduction

Application of visual effects during a stage play can add a considerable amount of realism to the whole play. There are a large number of visual effects that are used for theatrical plays. But, imagination and creativity are two vital elements in implementing these effects. Besides this, lighting effects are the common ones that are widely used to create a hover of visual realism. The other common visual effects are physical effects and pyrotechnics. In pyrotechnics, much care is taken to ensure safety over the stage, and it is mainly used in rock concerts.

During medieval times, visual effects were looked upon as an amazing experience. Today viewers feel surprised by the special effects in movies. At that time, though there were little means to create them, many things were used innovatively and cleverly. For example, wave machines were used to create an impression of the sea along with lights, and hidden ropes were used to move the cloth sideways. The use of many kinds of props and much hard work was undertaken in earlier times to create visual effects. The historical context of the visual effects in live performance is conveyed creatively with high degree of innovation. According to Black (2010), " Mass visual culture was inaugurated in the nineteenth century with the advent of a range of technologies, including the kaleidoscope, the daguerreotype, the photograph, and the cinema. As on the stage, visual technologies exploited light and movement in an effort to create the illusion of reality and transport viewers across time and space" (p. 94). Using this context, it makes good

sense to describe, interpret, and analyse the visual effects by employing the elements of literary contents.

## **Body**

Oedipus the king, King Lear, and A Doll's House are the major three plays of our literature that can be discussed in the light of the use of visual effects on stage during a live performance. Greek play writer Sophocles wrote "Oedipus the King" in around 430 B. C., and the play is staged countless times successfully due to its excellent tragic content. Further, Sir R. C. Jebb translated this famous play "The Oedipus Tyrannus" in prose in 1883. The noted scene in which Oedipus comes out as a blind man after knowing the shocking truth, will never have appeared so realistically if visual effects were not added. In this famous scene, there was no dialogue, but the tragedy unfolded with the correct lighting and movement. According to Seale (1982), "But, more to the point is the actual frequency and significance of such visual effects in Sophocles; the grim sight of Oedipus in Oedipus the King, blinded and bearing the sign of the self-mutilation, is with us for the whole of the final scene, finally to be exploited by the presence of his two young daughters who are brought for him to hold before they are dragged away" (p. 13). This shows to help us understand that how visual effects continue to play a vital role in live stage performance from time immemorial.

The play "King Lear" written by Shakespeare is not only a play that has been enacted on stage several times, but also a play that has been converted into a motion picture. In the tragic story, King Lear goes mad after his foolish act of disposing his kingdom between his daughters. It is believed

that the story draws its inspiration from a mythological character of pre-Roman era. Actually, it was very difficult to convert this play into a theatrical performance, but this is finally done only through visual effects. Music, lighting and props were used to make the play a realistic one to the spectators. According to Leggatt (2009), “ The stage was filled with dry-ice fog, stirred by a wind machine. Lear held a quivering twig in his hand.. Thunder was heard, and occasionally the lights flashed full on to indicate lightning” (p. 69). It indicates as to how visual effects are used successfully in staging this famous play.

In addition, no one can ever forget the “ Mock Trial Scene” from “ King Lear” where Lear conducted a mock trial, and it was accompanied by the Fool and the Edgar. Dramatic use of light and sound was used during that era to make the scene alive. Today, modern sound engineering is used to get the desired effect of the old scene. Besides, costume design is another aspect of the grand success of the play “ King Lear” over the years as royalty can be not shown without grand clothing. The costume of the king had always been the finer ones with loads of gemstones. Sometimes, minimal stage props are used so that the attention of the viewers may not divert away from the lead actors and actresses.

Believe it or not, Shakespeare’s plays always have a mention of a storm, and King Lear is no exception in this regard. It can be imaginable that the play writer had no problem creating a storm in an outdoor theatre in those days. Sometimes, it may happen that the play is staged in a theatre bathed in sunlight. Then, it must be very problematic to create such effect with minimal things available at hand at that time. However, in modern days,

when King Lear is staged, there is no such issue. The house lights are made dim, and the light remains focused onto the stage to create an illusion of a storm along with excellent sound effects or recordings of the sound of an actual storm. Even artificial rainfall is now used to create a storm in the drama on stage. Here, the real challenge remains on making the voice of the actor (King Lear) audible to the audience in spite of the thunder sounds. It is really strange that Shakespeare managed to create the storm without the availability of today's lighting and sound effects. Most of his plays were staged in the Globe theatre which, at that time, was considered a masterpiece in itself. The Globe Theatre was built in such a manner with trap doors and artificial ceiling that visual effects can be created. The trapdoors were called "hell" and the false ceiling as "heaven." In addition, canon balls were used at that time to create the thunder sound. This was achieved by rolling them over low wooden staves at regular intervals.

A Doll's House is the last play that will be discussed here. The play, written by Norwegian play writer Henrik Ibsen, deals with the story of a typical housewife who becomes frustrated with her arrogant husband. In this, a great emphasis has been laid on the importance of costume to create a visual impression. According to Barnet and Cain (2009), "Let's begin with costume, specifically with Nora Helmer's changes of costumes in Ibsen's A Doll's House. In the first act, Nora wears ordinary clothing, but in the middle of the second act she puts on "a long, many-colored shawl" to be appropriate to the Italian dance, but surely its multitude of colors also expresses Nora's conflicting emotions, her hysteria, expressed too, in the fact that "her hair comes loose and falls down over her shoulders," but "she

doesn't notice" (192). In the final scene where Nora is shown to leave her home, her husband, and children, sound usage is the turning point. This is shown wonderfully and the door, which actually works as a reflection of a world, is used. Ibsen's (2009) study found the following:

" NORA: That our life together would be a real wedlock. Good Bye. (She goes out through the hall.)

HELMER:(Sinks down on a chair at the door and buries his face in his hands).  
Nora! Nora! (Looks round, and rises.) Empty. She is gone. (A hope flashes across his mind.) (The sound of a door shutting is heard from below)" (p. 114).

It is matter of great interest in the modern context that set, costume, light, and sound were apt when the play " A Doll's House" was enacted on the stage for the first time at the Royal Theatre in Denmark. Later on, many changes were done in the script as well to suit the cultural needs of different nations. However, what remains common is the prominence of the sound of the door throughout the play. Pia's (2011) study found the following:

" It is Christmas Day. Gift packages are on tables and a couch and have been opened. Sewing basket is on the end table below couch. Nora's dance costume is on the couch in two pieces. As Lights come up, NORA is pacing the floor in an apprehensive state. A sound is heard off stage by the main entrance. She crosses UC to listen. She then crosses to the mailbox and sees nothing. She hesitates again and listens" (p. 97).

This wonderfully states that how much attention is paid to set, lighting, sound , costume, and movement in each scene of the play.

## Visual Effect Analysis of Three Plays

In all the three plays, “ Oedipus the king, King Lear, and A Doll’s House,” the nuanced elements of sound, lighting, and costume play a vital role in making the stage production successful over and over again. In the first one i. e.

Oedipus the king, it is lightning and movements of the stage actors that grab the attention of the viewers. This is especially notable during the final scene where the main protagonist blinds himself due to sheer guilt.

In King Lear, costume plays an important role as the main actor is shown to be a king. These costumes appear grand to ragged one as the story unfolds to depict the misery of the king. The storm scene could have turned flat if there were no visual effects. In fact, these effects make believe us that all that we are watching is real, and we are actually a part of it. All the three plays are very old, yet they do not lose their importance over the centuries.

A Doll’s House shows that how a stage-play can make a huge difference in the society if it is enacted properly. The play was staged for the first time in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Soon, it became a topic of discussion before the sound of the door closed by the female protagonist remained in memory for a much longer period. The play has been staged several times all over the world with minor changes in the ending. What remains common all through these years in the stage performance is the brilliant amalgamation of sound, light, movement, and costume design to enhance the performance of the artists.

## Conclusion

Based on the aforesaid description, interpretation, analysis, and explanation on the visual effects in each of the three plays, it can be clearly and justifiably concluded that visual effects can enhance the appeal of a play in a drastic and dramatic manner. These effects not only help to set the mood, but also compel the viewers to visualize the entire act in rapt attention. In this context, it is important to note that the director uses the lighting and sound effects to create the stage as a wonderland. Further, trap doors remain as an entry point for something that, according to the storyline, should appear from nowhere. Therefore, I feel that the most important thing is to focus ample lighting on lead actors, and make their voice audible to the crowd of spectators. Using these tips and techniques will certainly enable visual effects to become appealing and captivating in the effective presentation of the plays.

## Works Cited

- Black, Joseph, et al. *British Literature: An Historical Overview*. Canada: Broadview Press, 2010. Print.
- Leggatt, Alexander. *King Lear: Second Edition*. London: Manchester University Press, 2009. Print.
- Seale, David. *Vision and Stagecraft in Sophocles*. London: Croom Helm Ltd, 1982. Print.
- Barnett, Sylvan; Cain, E. Willaim. *A Short Guide to Writing about Literature*. India: Dorling Kindersley Pvt Ltd, 2009. Print.
- Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll's House*. Rockville: Serenity Publishers, 2009. Print.



- Pia, Albert. *A Doll's House: One Act Adaptation*. Washington: The Dramatic Publishing Company, 2011. Print.