

## Solo Theatre Piece

Word count: 2500

Page count: 5

### Ai:

According to Britannica Julie Taymor was born December 15, 1952. She was born in Newton, Massachusetts. When Taymor was 16 she went to attend Jacques Lecoq's Mime school in Paris, to finish high school. After one year she returned to the U.S. and began studies at Oberlin College where she studied folklore and mythology. She is a director, theorist, playwright, and costume designer. She is known for Asian-inspired masks and puppets. She is known for directing and producing *The Lion King*. Taymor works through different techniques to fulfill her theory and her intentions. These techniques include color, puppetry/mask, animalistic movements, and symbolism. Taymor's theory is about "total theater" which involves variations of production elements such as music, puppetry, dance, and visual arts or color, to create an immersive theatrical experience (*Blumberg*). According to the National Endowment for the Arts Taymor's intentions are all about innovation and achieving engagement with the audience for them to experience innovation and also create a new experience for the audience. She says innovation is about "transformation and creating a new taste, a new feel, a new experience." Taymor looks at the medium itself and how the story is being told. She finds when the story is moving it will be meaningful to the audience. However, to fulfill that intention of achieving innovation she says "it's a balancing act where the technology or the physicality or the art of it can supersede the storytelling.", and this is where Taymor comes back to her techniques and theories. We can see where she uses her techniques in her re-creation of *The Lion King*. She uses puppetry, color, and animalistic characterization to convey the storyline but also capture the attention of the audience with her use of bright colors which leads to this new creation of *The Lion King*, thus creating innovation. These techniques can work in numerous ways on stage, for example when it comes to *The Lion King* we see how her theory and techniques can work in different ways. When she uses color to present the amazing colors of Africa and its environment while also using color within the costume. She uses dance as a form for fight scenes. This technique was inspired by different kinds of martial arts around the world. Taymor took this inspiration to again fulfill her intention of innovation and a new experience for the audience. She tries to innovate with an already-known story to create that new experience, and with puppetry, Taymor has been strongly influenced by the theatrical traditions of Indonesia and how she developed mask-dance for years and incorporates puppets, color, and costume. She has also been influenced by Italy's satirical and improvisation *Commedia dell'arte*. After having a life of travels and studying abroad she decided to live around such as Indonesia, Eastern Europe, and Japan, where she picked up all the influences for mainly puppetry and masks which then introduced her aspects to the world. For color though, Taymor usually drew influences from mythology, folklore, and traditional art forms (*Gross*).

**Aii:**

**Color:**

Taymor often uses color to convey emotion, create atmosphere, and enhance storytelling. Taymor's approach to color is deeply rooted in her understanding of the cultural and symbolic significance of colors. Taymor drew a lot of influence as well from theoretical factors on how she would approach theater and art, such as total theater and cross-cultural influences. This cross-cultural approach is evident in her use of diverse visual styles, music, and storytelling techniques, as well as visual storytelling symbolism and metaphors. She often uses color as a way of symbolizing and providing metaphors to the audience, conveying deeper meanings and themes. Taymor incorporates visual elements that carry symbolic significance which allows for her audience to interpret her work on different levels. Taymor's recreation of *The Lion King*, this show is a perfect example where Taymor uses color to create meaningfulness with each part of the story whether that is the scenery or even the colors used in costume and makeup (*"How does Julie Taymor use color"*). According to J-Stage another way she used color within *The Lion King* was with the actors and actresses, using "color-conscious casting". Skin color is a racial characteristic that is easy to identify visually, so, casting African Americans incorporates color and presents an important theme of the musical: "The Power of Africa" (*Toshie*).

**Animalistic Characterization:**

According to [Armour.wustl.edu](http://Armour.wustl.edu) Julie Taymor, has a balance when it comes to animalistic characterization (*Admin*). According to *The Guardian*, she uses a mix between human-like movements and animalistic movements. With the movements, she also mixed the personality of the human and animal (*Wiegand*). According to [smithsonianmag.com](http://smithsonianmag.com) to use animalistic characterization Taymor looks into a transformation of human to animal and draws into the mindset of half-human half-animal (*Rothstein*). She often uses movement techniques with the help of costumes and puppetry to bring an animal character to life on stage. This involves the actor physically embodying the animal through its animal traits (*"How does Julie Taymor use animalistic characterization"*). According to *The Guardian*, an example we see this in is again in her re-creation of *The Lion King*. Taymor says "I wanted to present the animal and the human simultaneously", for example when she created the giraffe, she used stilts to get the height but purposely showed the arms of the dancers. We see personalities mixed up with the hyenas in *The Lion King*. She saw them as the bad guys so while having animalistic movements she had the characterization of a stereotypical gangster (*Wiegand*).

**Artistic intention:** The intention of my theater project is to portray the process of a caterpillar turning, into a butterfly using animal traits, dance, shadow puppetry, and color. The piece will highlight the emotional journey of the caterpillar from its beginning to its transformation, into a butterfly visually capturing this shift. The piece is geared towards viewers aged 17+, the performance aims to offer a visually captivating and intellectually stimulating production that honors life's circle of life and the beauty of metamorphosis.

**Bi:**

I found inspiration in Julie Taymor's theory ***“Often you’re moved by the medium itself, by the way [the story] is being told”*** Julie Taymor (Gross). Throughout the process, I faced challenges and the developments evolved to achieve my goal of **“transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly through animalistic characterization”**. My first step involved shaping the storyline. Inspiration was drawn from Taymor's use of color and animalistic portrayal. I studied reference materials to understand how these aspects are manifested through movements that convey emotions and character effectively. This process mirrored Taymor's methods in 'The Lion King,' where actors studied animal behaviors closely. I explored types of animals one symbolizing prey and the other predator to learn how to utilize portrayals skillfully. Taking a cue from Taymor's reliance on workshops for her actors I also conducted workshops to delve into characterization translating animal movements into expressions while capturing each creature's essence. By observing animal mannerisms and gestures like the sharp movements of a deer I honed my skills and embodied various creatures such, as caterpillars and butterflies.

This journey not only improved my ability to portray animal characters but also helped shape a compelling story focused on transformation in line, with Taymor's storytelling philosophy emphasizing engaging narratives.

My next steps in developing my performance I carefully mapping out the storyline by detailing the beginning, middle, and end stages. I started with a focus, on the phase setting up the narrative with the birth of a caterpillar progressing through its stage and concluding with the peaceful end of its transformation into a butterfly. This storytelling approach was influenced by **“recognizing the circle of life”**, drawing inspiration from Taymor's work in The Lion King. To shape my narrative I delved into research on caterpillars' lifespans to spark ideas for the opening segment. I then immersed myself in observing caterpillar movements infusing them with traits, rather than mere naturalism to align with my artistic vision of using physicality and color to convey the story's essence. Furthermore, I began brainstorming ideas for design to visualize how the caterpillar would traverse its environment aiming to capture a forest backdrop reminiscent of Taymor's depiction of African landscapes. This creative direction intertwined seamlessly with conveying the theme of transformation as we witness the caterpillar's growth into a butterfly—a journey that evokes both wonder and adult introspection through resonance.

Next, I focused on refining the middle and the end sections of the production. I went back, to my research to explore deeper into the life cycle of butterflies aiming to add variety to how I depicted them by showing a butterfly flying. This exploration also got me thinking about costume design for the stage and the butterfly's wings. I imagined the wings to be big and colorful, emphasizing hues and representing the beauty of a butterfly's transformation, inspired by Taymor's use of color in 'The Lion King.' This ties in with my goal of presenting the performance in a thought-provoking way. While perfecting the ending part I noticed a shift towards focusing on dance moves to portray the butterfly than just animal-like traits. This realization led me back to workshops to refine how I moved and gestured as a butterfly along with rehearsals to

memorize every detail of the performance. Additionally, I selected music that would complement this section enriching the experience, for our audience.

The last part of my development was working on my lighting. I was using a shadow screen, as mentioned in my artistic tension **“shadow puppetry”** I wanted to play around with that. I took inspiration from Taymor again as she uses shadow puppetry and helped me figure out what color I wanted for the shadows green and then figure out what color would go through with my performance going back to my artistic intention, I wanted this **“visually striking”** so for the caterpillar part, I had one fixed color compared to the butterfly. I figured it would have multiple colors to show its beauty.

### **Bii:**

My aspects of the theory are color and animalistic characterization. In my performance, I tried to achieve both of these theories. Colorful costume and lighting, animalistic, characterization to body and emotion. It was important for the audience to see both aspects as they both tell the story in the process of metamorphosis. By using physical action, I was able to show animalistic characterization. However, I asked for audience feedback to see if I fulfilled the goal. When asked if they could recognize the two different animals. All of the audience feedback replied with yes, stating it was a caterpillar and a butterfly. I asked how animal characterization helps enhance the story, and one of the resonances I got said **“The use of animalistic characterization adds depth to”** continuing **“movements, embodies the treats and effectively conveys the beauty in essence of the transformation in growth”** With this response, I can see that the audience understood the movement and how that adds into the growth and transformation. Another one added the **“process of the growth of a butterfly, who learns how to fly shows the beauty of the circle of life”**. The audience understood the animals to characterize in a way where they could see a story with it. This also fulfills my aim of the reconstruction of the circle of life. To see if I truly embodied a butterfly or caterpillar got audience feedback on this. **“Blending movements and hand gestures at different levels of height as well”** Here, I can see that the audience appreciated the detail that went into the movement and thought about levels played into the caterpillar as a character. **“I can see that a butterfly had big stylistic movements, while the caterpillar. Particularly movements were captured very well through the crawling, and overall the way that the body was exploited to embody that this animal”** In this quote, I can see that there was a clear difference between the different animalistic characterization of the caterpillar and butterfly, which is what I want to achieve to set a big difference between them to show that change.

When it came to my aspect of color, I also asked for audience feedback on that specifically how it added to the performance. Color was also something I relied on to achieve my aim. **“The changes in the color of light evokes heartfelt emotional responses”**, and **“rainbow colors are very visually striking to my eyes and make me feel happy”** Both of these quotes help fulfill my aim in my artistic tension as I wanted to achieve a visually striking experience and with this, I felt color was my best option to do that as I wanted to be attractive to the eye, therefore, creating an unforgettable experience. I wanted there to be a transformation with the color lighting to tie in with the metamorphosis. One audience member said, **“The bright colors**

**helped capture the beauty of the transformation, creating a feel-good emotion as an audience member”** This helps me understand that my aim was fulfilled to create and capture, a visually striking experience of life, and specifically nature as well.

Overall, I feel I hit some strengths and limitations.

**Strengths:** I feel when it came to a visually striking performance for my audience members, I succeeded in that. In order to see if it was thought-provoking I asked the audience and one replied **“Yes, it does. The beauty of this transformation has made me appreciate all the good things in life ponder on all the bad things and sometimes we forget to count and appreciate all the good things we have which outnumber the bad things, has made me see there are so many wonders out there in the world which makes life worth living”**. With this reply, I can tell that the piece was able to be thought-provoking and allow the audience to reflect on life and how beautiful it can be. With the audience feedback stated I feel that I also succeeded in using my aspects of animalistic characterization and color, as well as the story-line showing the metamorphosis, which allows me to relate to Taymor’s quote **“Often you’re moved by the medium itself, by the way [the story] is being told”**(Gross), and how my storyline was moving.

**Limitations:** I honestly don’t feel there were many limitations due to the audience's feedback. However, there were two things mentioned in my artistic intention that I am not sure if it was fulfilled because there was no audience feedback on it. These two things are emotion and shadow puppetry. There was not much feedback on the emotions of the characters and the shadow puppetry I used with the shadow screen I feel was not used effectively enough for the audience to notice. When it comes to the emotion I feel I should have gone bigger with my emotion for my audience members to notice a change within the emotion of the characters.

## Bibliography

Admin. "ACID TRIPS and DRIFTWOOD MASKS: REFLECTIONS on JULIE TAYMOR." *Armour*, 7

Nov. 2019, [armour.wustl.edu/2019/11/07/julie-taymor/](http://armour.wustl.edu/2019/11/07/julie-taymor/).

Begley, Sarah. "Julie Taymor on the Lion King and Her Creative Process."

*Time*, 8 Oct. 2015, [time.com/4065287/julie-taymor-creative-process/](http://time.com/4065287/julie-taymor-creative-process/).

Blumberg, Naomi. "Julie Taymor." *Britannica*, 10 July 2014, [www.britannica.com/biography/Julie-Taymor](http://www.britannica.com/biography/Julie-Taymor).

Day, Helen. "Practitioner Focus: Julie Taymor." *Drama and Theatre*, Mark Allen Group, 1 May 2022, [www.dramaandtheatre.co.uk/practical/article/practitioner-focus-julie-taymor](http://www.dramaandtheatre.co.uk/practical/article/practitioner-focus-julie-taymor).

Gross, Rebecca. "Julie Taymor." *National Endowment for the Arts*, 2011, [www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2011/4/what-innovation/julie-taymor](http://www.arts.gov/stories/magazine/2011/4/what-innovation/julie-taymor).

“How does Julie Taymor use animalistic characterization” prompt. *ChatGPT*, Day Month version, OpenAI, Day Month Year, chat.openai.com/chat.

“How does Julie Taymor use color” prompt. *ChatGPT*, 13 Feb. version, OpenAI, 16 Feb. 2023, [chat.openai.com/chat](https://chat.openai.com/chat).

Rothstein, Edward. "35 Who Made a Difference: Julie Taymor." *Arts and Culture*, Smithsonian Magazine, 1 Nov. 2005, [www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/35-who-made-a-difference-julie-taymor-115538544/](http://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/35-who-made-a-difference-julie-taymor-115538544/).

Toshie, Takeda. "Color-Blind Casting of Animals:Julie Taymor's Representation Strategy in the Musical 'The Lion King.'" *The American Review*, Japanese Association for American Studies, 2021, [www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/americanreview/55/0/55\\_121/article/-char/en](http://www.jstage.jst.go.jp/article/americanreview/55/0/55_121/article/-char/en).

Tribune, Chicago. "Costume Designer Gets Her Due." *Chicago Tribune*, 3 Dec. 2000, [www.chicagotribune.com/2000/12/03/costume-designer-gets-her-due/](http://www.chicagotribune.com/2000/12/03/costume-designer-gets-her-due/).

Wiegand, Chris. "Julie Taymor: How We Made the Lion King Musical." *The Guardian*, 22 Oct. 2019, [www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/oct/22/julie-taymor-how-we-made-the-lion-king-musical](http://www.theguardian.com/stage/2019/oct/22/julie-taymor-how-we-made-the-lion-king-musical).

### Bibliography sound clips from the performance

"Beethoven: Symphony No. 6 in F Major, Op. 68 'Pastoral' | Classical Music."  
*YouTube*, 19 Mar. 2016, m.youtube.com/  
 watch?v=pE4SdB-0gkY&pp=ygUrU3ltcGhvbngkTm8uIDYgaW4gRiBNYWpvciwgT3AulDY4lCd  
 QYXN0b3  
 JhbA%3D%3D.

"Fearless Motivation Instrumentals - You Did the Impossible - Song Mix (Epic Music)." *YouTube*, 1 Nov. 2017, m.youtube.com/watch?v=Styhm6Bz5Zk&pp=ygUITXVzaWMgdGhhbCBzb3VuZHMgbGlrZSBuZXcgYmVnaW5u aW5ncw%3D%3D.

"Forest River Nature Sounds-Gentle Stream Sleeping Sound-Natural Calming Meditation Birdsong Ambience." *Youtube*, YouTube, 17 June 2019, [m.youtube.com/watch?v=d0tU18Ybcvk&pp=ygUUTmF0dXJlIHNdW5kcyBmb3Jlc3Q%3D](https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=d0tU18Ybcvk&pp=ygUUTmF0dXJlIHNdW5kcyBmb3Jlc3Q%3D).

"Leg Bone Break - Sound Effect for Editing." *YouTube*, 3 July 2020, m.youtube.com/watch?v=aCRogH6EQOs&pp=ygUTU2xvd2x5IGNyYWtpbmcgYm9uZQ%3D%3D.