

# TRANS- FORM

Classic Texts + Contemporary Performance  
2020 Online Resource



LA BOITE  
THEATRE COMPANY

## ELIZABETHAN THEATRE

Historically, Elizabethan theatre refers to plays performed in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I (1558–1603); these include works by William Shakespeare and his contemporaries, such as Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson, Thomas Dekker, Thomas Kyd, Thomas Heywood and Robert Greene.

The identifiable acting and staging conventions common to Elizabethan theatre include soliloquy, aside, boys performing female roles, masque, eavesdropping, presentational acting style, dialogue and play within a play. Stagecraft is characterised by elaborate costumes and minimal scenery.

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## GREEK THEATRE

Refers to Greek drama originating in the 5th century onwards and the emergence of three dramatic genres: tragedy, comedy and the satyr play.

Greek dramatic works contain a well-defined beginning, middle and end, with the play progressing clearly and systematically to its conclusion.

Greek drama is often characterised by the inclusion of a chorus, which underscores the ideas of the play, provides point of view and focuses on the issues of the play and implications of the action. The chorus establishes the play's ethical system and participates in the action. The plays often contain singing, with many plays closely associated with religion.

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## CONTEMPOARAY PERFORMANCE

Contemporary Performance is a body of work that builds on an aesthetic history beginning in the 1880s with Alfred Jarry and early Dada experiments. It has developed through the avant-garde and performance art of the 1980s and continues into our post-modern contemporary condition.

Contemporary performance is often non-narrative, technically rigorous and characterised by openness of form. Performances unsettle perception, demand critical engagement from audiences, address conceptual debates within aesthetics and draw on a diverse range of cultural interests.

Conventions of Contemporary performance include intertextuality, hypertextuality, hybridity and openness of form, fragmentation, appropriation, and integration of live, site-specific and mediated performance.

Contemporary performance is hybrid work that integrates text, physical theatre / dance, visual theatre, non-linear form, objects, music, costumes, lighting, image, sound, sets, and vocal expression into complex interactive systems.

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# CONVENTIONS

## Elizabethan Theatre

|                               |                   |              |
|-------------------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| HEIGHTENED EMOTION AND ACTION | IAMBIC PENTAMETER | SOLILOQUY    |
| DIRECT ADDRESS                | ASIDE             | POETIC IMAGE |
| PRESENTATIONAL ACTING         |                   |              |

## Greek Theatre

|        |                       |                   |
|--------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| CHORUS | HEIGHTENED EMOTION    | HEIGHTENED ACTION |
| MASK   | PRESENTATIONAL ACTING |                   |

## Contemporary Performance

|                  |                        |                           |
|------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|
| FRAGMENTATION    | INTERTEXTUALITY        | SITE-SPECIFIC PERFORMANCE |
| HYBRIDITY        | MEDIATISED PERFORMANCE | HYPERTEXTUALITY           |
| PHYSICAL THEATRE | NON-LINEAR FORM        |                           |

## Forming Task: Transform

1. Select either a Greek or Elizabethan excerpt of text.
2. Apply 1-2 of the conventions of Contemporary Performance to the excerpt, in order to transform the text.

For Example:

Taking the prologue of *Romeo and Juliet* and applying fragmentation/non-linear form in order break up the scene.

*Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,*

Cut to: a frozen image of the Capulets at home and the Montagues at home.

*From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.*

Cut to: a fight scene. Two people battle each other with swords.

*From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;*

Cut to: Romeo and Juliet, staring at each other from across the party.

### **Forming Task:** Leadership Then and Now

Both Greek and Elizabethan Theatre feature many powerful figures including monarchs and politicians.

To make connections to the present day political scene, choose several contemporary leaders and read articles on these persons in magazines and newspapers, noting their decisions and behaviours. Questions to be discussed include:

Do political decisions seem to be based on principle or made for pragmatic ends?

Which philosophy seems to rule the leaders' political behaviour?

How do you know?

What are the benefits and disadvantages of each leader's style of political leadership?

### **Character Exploration:** Social Media

In order to explore how characters from another time period may behave if they lived in 2020, consider what their presence on social media would be. This exploration can then be used to devise content for a transformed version of the original text.

Pick a character from the classic text you are exploring and create one of the following social media content options.

Consider:

- What are they posting?
- What is important to them?
- How many followers do they have?
- Is their account public or private?
- How does their bio read?

Instagram:

- Create six Instagram posts for a character of your choice.

Youtube:

- Create a short video of something they may upload on their personal account.

Snapchat:

- Create six snap chats for the character of your choice.

Spotify:

- Curate a playlist that your character would listen to.

Tik Tok:

- Create three Tik Tok posts for the character of your choice.

Extension Task:

Use this as pretext for a contemporary adaptation of your chosen class text and devise a scene.

## Case Study: Romeo and Juliet

*A MODERN ROMANCE – KIDS KILLING KIDS*

*THESE VIOLENT DELIGHTS HAVE VIOLENT ENDS*

A 21st century re-imagining of Shakespeare's iconic love story, La Boite's production of *Romeo and Juliet* takes no prisoners in its version of theatre's infamous star-crossed lovers. Two families at war, two teenagers in love, a three-day affair that ends in six deaths. Did Romeo and Juliet love too much, too hard, too soon? Did their union even stand a chance? And why do we still care? Under the gripping direction of Todd MacDonald, the ongoing partnership between La Boite and QUT promises to pack a punch. Brisbane's best emerging actors perform alongside an ensemble of incomparable senior artists in La Boite's take on this enduring Shakespearean love story.

Education Behind the Scenes: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VdYD4PQr4EA>



## Case Study: Lysa and the Freeborn Dames by Claire Christian

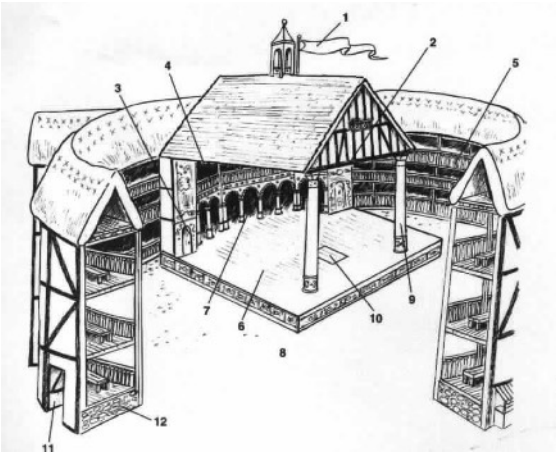
Lysa King is nineteen and angry. She has come home after a year away, where she has seen revolution happen everywhere in the wake of the Women's Marches – everywhere but home. Lysa takes matters into her own hands by staging an epic protest on the biggest night of the year... except only three of her friends and a plucky young policeman show up. This wasn't exactly what she had in mind. Hours later, trapped in the local football club, Lysa is faced with a difficult decision – will she dig her heels in for the sake of change, even if it burns every bridge she's ever walked? Led by a fierce chorus of senior women, this fury fuelled dramedy centres on a young woman who's on the cusp of her political awakening, grappling with the significance of legacy and self-empowerment in the face of adversity. Inspired by Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, Christian lands us in the present with this hilarious, messy and glitter filled response to the power of women globally.

Trailer: <https://vimeo.com/278428232>



## Staging: Traditional Versus Contemporary

Compare and contrast the different stage elements between the traditional stages and contemporary La Boite set designs.

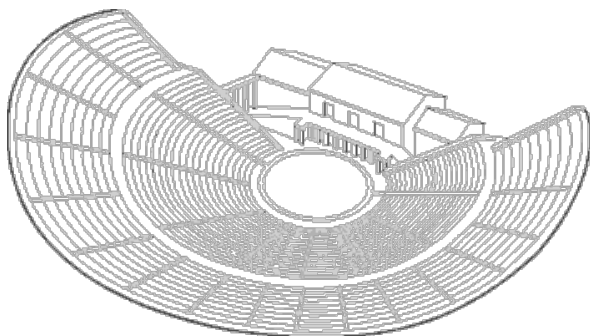


The Globe Theatre



La Boite's *Romeo and Juliet* Set

Traditional Greek Amphitheatre



*Lysa and the Freeborn Dames* Set



## Research Task: Dig Deeper

Online there are countless of examples of theatre companies adapting Romeo and Juliet and Lysistrata. See if you can find other examples on youtube, Vimeo and other streaming services. Identify what conventions of Contemporary Performance (see page 2) are utilised and how.

## **Devising:** Intertextual References

Intertextuality means 'the relationship between texts, especially literary ones'. Classic texts have been the inspiration of many art forms and artists over the years, especially music.

Examples include:

*Love Story* by Taylor Swift  
*Thieving Hearts* by Emma Dean  
*Ophelia* by The Lumineers  
*Greek Tragedy* by The Wombats

1. Find a song that was inspired by a classic text.
2. Find the lyrics to the song.
3. Using the lyrics, devise a scene that could be in a contemporary adaptation of your selected classical text. This can either be a brand new scene or you can intertwine the lyrics/music with the original text to create something new.

## **Devising:** Recontextualise Text

1. Analyse a passage of original text from a classical work to decipher its purpose/meaning. For example, the prologue from *Romeo and Juliet* establishes the context of the two households fighting and the meeting of R + J.

*Two households, both alike in dignity,  
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,  
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,  
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.  
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes  
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;  
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows*

2. Consider how you could recontextualise the text in the 21st century, and devise a scene that would tell the audience the same information. For example, in Baz Luhrmann's film version of *Romeo and Juliet* they use a news report to establish context. Other examples could include a text message conversation, a breakfast TV interview, a Facebook post.
3. Utilising the original text/dialogue, re-write the scene within its new context.

See Baz Luhrmann's version as an example of how the original text can be used in a new context: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=beV56hp4T3w>