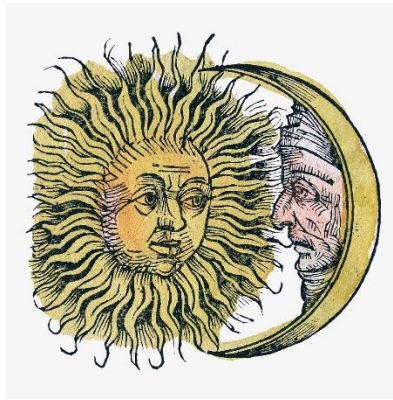


“400 Years, 400 Times”:

Devising Symbolic Theatre – A Critical Commentary



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Independent Project for BA Musical Theatre – ADPA6000

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1 . Project Overview

My independent project investigates the question “How can mythological symbolism be used in theatre to communicate themes of forbidden love and fate?” and I will be exploring this by creating a short theatre play inspired by mythology, specifically on the relationship between the sun and moon. I chose this concept as it is a personal interest of mine, and it explores themes of love and fate. As a spiritual person, I am very interested in mythology and folklore. I am also extremely inspired by astrology. I surround myself with images and depictions of the sun and moon, so I was intrigued to create a story for the two. I am also inspired by William Shakespeare’s writing, particularly his play *Romeo and Juliet*, which led me to write a romantic tragedy. I wanted to explore how abstract theatre can become emotionally engaging for an audience.

This investigation explores how mythological symbolism can be used within theatre. Using symbolism helps theatre represent themes such as love, fate, destiny, separation, and forbidden love, which is my overall goal for the practical investigation—using the sun and moon as central characters who are symbols themselves. The project examines how non-human concepts can be embodied and communicated through performance. The investigation is relevant to theatre, as I am creating a theatre piece. Additionally, I am exploring ways to use symbolism in theatre through staging and writing by reviewing examples of mythological stories told in modern literature, such as *Hadestown*.

The overall aim of this investigation is to explore how mythology and symbolism can be utilised in theatre to convey emotional themes and relationships. The project examines how non-human and celestial concepts can be embodied through performance using dialogue, staging and movement. I also wanted to explore how symbolism can allow audiences to interpret emotional meaning in various ways, rather than presenting everything in a literal sense.

This project combines research with practical exploration throughout the development process. The ideas and theories explored within the literature review were then experimented with through scriptwriting, rehearsals and staging. Throughout the process, I explored how symbolism, movement and minimal staging could be used to communicate emotional themes and relationships between the characters. I also experimented with physical distance, positioning and dialogue as ways to represent celestial movement, longing and separation. This allowed the practical work to develop alongside the research, with both continuously influencing creative decisions throughout the investigation.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

My investigation explores the question “How can mythological symbolism be used in theatre to communicate themes of forbidden love and fate?” The research from this literature review will inform and support the development of my practical investigation. This review examines mythologies, symbolism and tragedies to gather context for the storyline of my theatrical piece. All universal themes that have been historically used in literature and theatre to evoke intense emotions in audiences.

Reviewing literature for this investigation is vital, as it provides context for me to understand mythological stories, symbolism in performance and the romantic tragedy genre. This literature review analyses how to effectively communicate through performance with existing theatre practitioners and themes such as fate, longing and separation. This review explores tragic theatre, symbolism over realism, mythological narratives and performance theory through the work of practitioners and theorists such as Peter Brook, Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski, Roland Barthes and Carl Jung.

This review also examines literary and mythological texts, including *Romeo & Juliet*, *Pyramus and Thisbe*, and *Orpheus and Eurydice*, alongside research into the science behind the sun and the moon. This research will inform the practical development of my own theatrical investigation.

2.2 Thematic Review

The first thing I investigated was theatre and theory practitioners who would be relevant to my writing goals. I was influenced by Peter Brook as his work focuses on simplicity in theatre, which relates to the minimal staging that I was aiming for. He also seems to write with symbolism, and he seems to appeal to audience's imagination. This is apparent in their play *Orghast*. As cited by Weber:

Actors spoke in unpredictable inflections; they also chanted, incanted, wailed, cried, and made the most extraordinary sounds, but always in combination with *Orghast* words, which defy literal analysis. (Weber, 2006: 150)

This links to my idea as I am aiming for symbolic storytelling and celestial themes. Another reason he is relevant is that he wrote a series of short plays that will be similar to my project. Then, there's Antonin Artaud, who believed theatre should create emotional and sensory experiences rather than rely on dialogue and realism. Artaud's theatre of cruelty focuses on imagery, movement and intense emotional expression. Symbolism and imagery are important in Artaud's work because they enable audiences to emotionally engage with ideas, rather than simply understanding them intellectually. This approach could be applied to my investigation using abstract staging and symbolic representation of celestial bodies and fate. Additionally, Jerzy Grotowski focused on minimalist theatre and physical storytelling. Grotowski believed the actor's body could become the primary tool for communication and emotional expression. Physical storytelling can convey symbolism through the use of movement, positioning, and

gesture to represent emotions and relationships. This is relevant to my piece because I wanted the actors to physically embody celestial beings and emotional tension through staging and performance.

Roland Barthes in his 1957 study *Mythologies* suggests that myths can turn cultural ideas and beliefs into something that feels natural or inevitable to society; ([1959] 2009). According to Barthes, myths make ideas appear timeless and universally accepted, even when they are socially created. His ideas could relate to theatre as audiences may accept symbolic stories and characters emotionally without needing literal realism. Carl Jung developed the idea of archetypes, which are recognisable character types and symbols that exist beneath the population's subconscious:

Myth succeeds as an intermediary when the conscious, literal meaning of a myth suggests another, symbolic meaning, which for Jung is the psychological one. (Segel, 1998: 85)

Archetypes are useful in storytelling because audiences can quickly recognise emotional roles and relationships within a narrative. Characters such as star-crossed lovers are often recognised as tragic archetypes associated with fate, longing and inevitable separation. This relates to my investigation because my characters represent symbolic and recognisable emotional figures rather than completely realistic individuals.

Mythological symbolism is often used to elevate a story by displaying complex human emotions and societal structures. They can communicate these emotions through storytelling and the use of imagery, metaphors and gods or celestial figures. The kind of emotions these help portray

would be heightened emotions such as grief, love and longing, often expressed as timeless and larger than life. As David Bidney has observed:

Myth is not a reflection of an objective reality independent of it, but is rather the product of true creative, spiritual actions, an independent image world of the spirit as well as an active force of expression. Myth is the first expression of a spiritual process of liberation which is effected in the progress from the magical-mythical world view to the truly religious view. (Bidney, 1955: 382).

This works well in theatre, specifically as you can show the story through visuals, allowing the audience to develop their own understanding and interpretations. Themes of forbidden love and fate are commonly explored within mythology and tragic theatre. These themes are most often used to create tension within a story. This is elevated when the characters are unable to escape the outcome. Mythological and tragic stories often focus on love being presented as a powerful but destructive emotion, often leading characters to suffer or separate. This raises the stakes within a story to feel more intense for audiences as the characters are aware of the consequences, but they continue to pursue their desires regardless. *HadesTown* is an example of modern literature that uses symbolism in theatre through staging and writing. Mitchell's musical is written about the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, but also has many underlying themes. She uses mythology as metaphors for current issues, such as climate change, economic inequality and authoritarianism. The show uses symbolism to represent non-human nature, as stated by Lonergan, "She sees the human as operating in a kind of ecology of metaphors, giving meaning to, and gaining meaning from, the rest of the natural world." (Lonergan 2025)

Symbolism is also portrayed through staging, particularly when Orpheus and Eurydice are

separated. Them being apart with their backs facing each other. I will be taking inspiration from this for my project.

Another important piece of literature to look at would be *Pyramus and Thisbe*, as it is a tale of star-crossed lovers from Babylonian mythology originally noted by Ovid *Metamorphoses*. It is also rumoured to have influenced Shakespeare's *Romeo & Juliet*. As Daniels wrote "The keen-eyed Shakespeare fan will notice that this myth is the clear inspiration for his great tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*" (Daniels 2016: 190). He also stages the tale inside *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; however, it is portrayed in a comedic way, twisting the tragic narrative. As observed by Davies:

‘*Pyramus and Thisbe*’, is almost a burlesque. Indeed, Shakespeare's departures here from Ovid's version of the Pyramus and Thisbe story seem to be shaped by the plot of *Romeo and Juliet*. (Davies, 2015)

Much like *Hadestown*, the themes of this piece correlate with the ideas for my project. This includes star-crossed lovers, tragedy and separation.

2.3 Tragedy

William Shakespeare as a playwright is canonical to Western literature, and who covered all relevant themes for my project. His stories include star-crossed lovers, tragedy, and mythological symbolism. He's widely recognised for his plays such as *Hamlet*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Othello* and many more. He, in fact, wrote and co-wrote 39 plays

and 154 sonnets overall. All of which mostly consisted of histories, tragedies and comedies. Themes such as fate, conflict, and love are commonly present throughout his work. He often used a mixture of genres. Many playwrights at the time would have rewritten old tales. He would have been well-versed in ancient Greek and Roman mythology from school. Many of his plays seemed to reflect the tales from these mythologies. *Romeo & Juliet* is not one of Shakespeare's most renowned plays, but it is also one of the most influential examples of forbidden love and fate. Shakespeare repeatedly presents the two lovers as destined and controlled by fate, often using the term "star-crossed lovers". Throughout the play, love is portrayed as powerful but ultimately destructive. The themes inside *Romeo & Juliet* are highly relevant to my investigation due to the use of fate, symbolism and celestial imagery. Also, the concept of their fate already being decided for them. This kind of messaging within the play creates the idea that the ending is unavoidable. The romantic tragedy genre commonly focuses on emotionally intense relationships that ultimately end in suffering. These stories often portray love as something powerful but dangerous. This creates emotional conflict for both the characters and the audience. Much like *Romeo & Juliet*, fate is also frequently referred to as unavoidable.

2.4 Mythology

There are many mythologies surrounding the sun and moon. These include Greek, Norse, and Philippine mythology. In Philippine mythology, Apolaki and Mayari are the two deities that represent the sun and the moon. They were both children of Bathala, creator of the world.

Apolaki, the sun is a man and Mayari, the moon is a woman. The two fought with wooden clubs over the title of their father, wanting to rule over the world. The fight continued until Apolaki struck Mayari, blinding her in one eye. He was so overcome with guilt that he proposed that they both rule in turns.

In Greek Mythology, two separate pairs represent the sun and the moon. Helios and Selene are personifications of the sun and moon, but Apollo and Artemis are deities associated with their symbolic qualities. Helios and Selene are often portrayed as celestial opposites who travel across the sky separately. Their relationship symbolises the balance between light and darkness, day and night and connection despite separation. Apollo and Artemis similarly reflect contrasting symbolic qualities. Apollo is commonly associated with the sun, light, music, truth, and healing. Artemis is associated with the moon, femininity, hunting, wildlife, childbirth and virginity; (see Daniels 2016: 134) These opposed symbolisms create emotional and visual imagery that has continued to influence storytelling, theatre and literature.

Inuit Mythology also contains stories surrounding the sun and the moon. Within Inuit Mythology, the sun and the moon are represented by the siblings Malina and Annigan. According to the myth, Annigan chases his sister across the sky in a violent pursuit. This explains why the moon follows the sun through the sky. The story symbolises distance and an endless cycle of separation. This is due to the celestial bodies never truly being able to meet. This myth is particularly relevant for its themes of longing and inevitability. The consistent movement of the sun and moon becomes symbolic of the emotional tension and unattainable connection. This also reinforces ideas surrounding fate and repetition, which connect closely to the themes explored within my investigation.

2.5 Celestial research

Scientifically, the sun is the centre of the Solar system and provides the Earth with heat, light and energy. It is the closest star to the Earth. It sits 93 million miles away, which is still 400 times further than the moon. If the sun were closer, the Earth would be uninhabitable due to the heat. The sun's gravity is also what holds our entire solar system together. Much like the moon, the sun is 4.5 billion years old. Scientists were able to discover through material gathered from the moon as the solar system developed around the same time. The physical relationship between the sun, the moon and the Earth also creates symbolism surrounding distance. Although the three are permanently connected through gravity and orbit, they are physically separated. This reinforces symbolic themes about longing and unattainable connection. These themes are commonly explored throughout tragic storylines.

Scientific research surrounding the moon is also relevant within this investigation, as understanding its physical relationship with the sun and the Earth will help form the symbolism. Current theories suggest that the moon was formed around 4.5 billion years ago following a collision between the early Earth and a planetary body often referred to as Theia. From the NASA website:

Earth's Moon is thought to have formed in a tremendous collision. A massive object — named Theia after the mythological Greek Titan who was the mother of Selene, goddess of the Moon — smashed into Earth, flinging material into space that became the Moon.
(Vogel, no year)

This theory is particularly significant as mythology is acknowledged even through the scientific theory. The moon also plays a significant role within the natural world through its gravitational pull, which influences ocean tides and contributes towards the Earth's stability and rotational balance. Its continuous orbit around the Earth creates a symbolic relationship surrounding distance, repetition and connection despite separation. These scientific ideas reflect the emotional themes explored within tragic and mythological storytelling.

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A solar eclipse occurs when the moon passes directly between the sun and the Earth. It temporarily blocks the sunlight and casts a shadow onto the Earth. According to the Natural History Museum, a total solar eclipse happens when the sun, moon and Earth align exactly. During this process, the moon can completely or partially cover the sun depending on their positioning. The moon creates two types of shadows during an eclipse: the umbra, where

sunlight is fully blocked, and the penumbra, where only part of the sunlight is covered. Solar eclipses are relatively rare events due to the moon's orbit being slightly tilted in comparison to the Earth's orbit around the sun. Partial eclipses happen multiple times a year, but total eclipses are less frequent and are only visible from certain parts of the world. The visual effect created by a solar eclipse often causes daylight to temporarily darken, creating an appearance like twilight. Historically, solar eclipses have fascinated societies, including the Ancient Greeks and Babylonians. This is due to their unusual appearances and the symbolic relationship between the sun and the moon.

Solar and lunar symbolism have still been significant throughout mythological and theatrical storytelling. It often represents opposite yet interconnected forces. Traditionally, the sun is associated with power, energy, and masculine divinity, (see Battistini 2006: 192). The moon often symbolises femininity, mystery, and emotional transformation. Together, these celestial symbols can represent duality and unattainable balance. This makes them extremely relevant within narratives surrounding forbidden love and tragic inevitability.

The literature review explored throughout this review highlights the significance of mythology, symbolism and tragic narratives within theatrical storytelling. Recurring themes surrounding fate, forbidden love, and emotional inevitability demonstrate how mythological narratives continue to resonate with audiences. Through both classical and modern interpretations, symbolism is frequently used to communicate emotional conflict. Furthermore, the research emphasised the importance of visual and physical storytelling within performance. Practitioners and theorists explored throughout the literature review demonstrated how movement, staging and recurring motifs can strengthen audience engagement and emotional interpretation. This

reinforced the idea that symbolism within theatre is not solely literary but can also be communicated through physical experimentation. These findings became the centre of the practical development of this project; the literature informed the exploration of symbolic staging and emotionally driven performance choices. Additionally, the research influenced both the narrative and aesthetics choices within the creative process.

In conclusion, the literature reviewed throughout this chapter demonstrated the continued relevance of mythology, symbolism and tragic storytelling within theatre and performance. The research highlighted how symbolic imagery can deepen audience engagement whilst reinforcing complex themes surrounding fate and forbidden love. The literature provided a strong theoretical foundation for the practical investigation. The following practical and developmental chapters will examine how these theoretical concepts were explored and applied through the creative process.

3. Development, Collaboration & Exploration

3. 1 Review of the Creative Development

3.1.1 Timeline of idea evolution and practice stages

At the beginning of the creative development process, I used what I had learned from our previous module, the collaboration project, where we learned how to write a theatre piece. In this module, we were taught to reflect on what inspires you first. I explored this, and as a spiritual person, I am very interested in mythology and folklore. I am also extremely inspired by astrology. I surround myself with images and depictions of the sun and moon, so I was intrigued by the idea of creating a story for these two celestial bodies. This led me to come up with an investigation that I wanted to explore. I decided to find out how mythological symbolism can be used in theatre to communicate themes of forbidden love and fate. This was also influenced by my interest in Shakespeare, particularly in his romantic tragedy *Romeo & Juliet*. My goal is to create a short play inspired by this that focuses on two star-crossed lovers who are fated to love each other but are forced apart. As I was taught, the next step in writing is developing characters. I was aware that I wanted to form two characters based on the sun and the moon. This made it extremely easy for me to form characterisations of the two entities, both from my initial impression and from the mythologies I had researched about them. I have also initially viewed both characters as feminine beings. I gave these feminine characters who represent the sun and moon the names Malina and Aurora.

I later changed the moon character's name to Theia, named after the large object that collided with the Earth, leading to the moon's creation. I also wanted to create a third character representing the earth that would act as both a mediator and an obstacle between the two love interests. I was initially unsure whether I wanted the characters to be the planets or human representations in a metaphorical sense. For me, it was important to have the characters appear as humans but exist in the storyline as planets. The challenge that follows this choice is whether it translates well to the audience. I had to combat this with the use of dialogue when approaching the writing phase. When approaching the writing for the play, I had to develop the storyline. I knew that as a romantic tragedy. My ideas for the play were clear from the beginning. I knew that the overall premise was going to be that the sun and moon could not meet, and I made the decision that the third character was going to be the reason. This was heavily inspired by the science behind the gravitational pull between the Earth and the Moon. At first, my goal was to have a setup for the plot and characters. Then, during the curve of the story, the two characters attempt to meet, but it goes wrong. And finally, in the end, they are able to meet most likely because of the solar eclipse. To further develop the storyline, I referred to Freytag's pyramid. Freytag's method led me to include a rising action and a falling action. In the final result for the plot, I wrote exposition as an introduction to the characters, the rising action as an explanation of the plot, the climax being Theia attempting to reunite with Aurora at the cost of Dana's well-being, the falling action being the resolution, and the denouement being them meeting but being dragged apart, aligning with the romantic tragedy genre. I needed a reason for the character Theia to leave her orbital place and endanger her friend, so after consideration, I chose to implement an argument as the climax scene. Also, in a revised

draft, I added more narration dialogue for Dana, the middle character, as a way to enhance the clarity of the piece. I then felt as though it needed more mythological references within the piece, so I added some star-crossed lovers from mythology and Greek plays.

For the staging, I wanted the characters to stand stationary, mimicking the planet's alignment. I wanted the set, staging, and props to be minimalistic to display the raw emotions that I was attempting to achieve. When I wrote the ending, I wanted it to refer back to the beginning using repetition through dialogue as I had previously researched, in relation to *Hadestown*:

We are back at the beginning. This moment of return demonstrates how the form of *Hadestown* can be seen as a metaphor for the act of theatre-making itself; rather like Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Carousel*, *Hadestown* shows that theatre too is a machine that goes around in a circle while giving the audience the impression that they have experienced something in linear time, with a beginning, middle and end. (Lonergan 2025)

This inspired me to use this type of symbolism to portray the story of the sun and moon and their cycle. In order for this to work effectively, I encouraged the actors to use Stanislavski's "given circumstances", which Bella Merlin describes as:

Given circumstances are essentially the springboard for your imagination, to propel you towards what Stanislavski calls "the magic 'if'". (Cited in Merlin 2016: 67)

3.1.2 Research informed Exploration

Research into symbolic theatre influenced many of the creative choices throughout the development process. After researching practitioners such as Antonin Artaud and Jerry Grotowski, I became more interested in using symbolism and physical performance rather than realism. I did not want the characters to feel entirely human or realistic, as they are representations of celestial bodies. Instead, I wanted the audience to understand them emotionally and symbolically through staging, dialogue and movement. This led me to explore abstract storytelling throughout the writing and rehearsal process. Also, research into minimalistic theatre also influenced the staging of the piece. Peter Brook focuses on simplicity within theatre, which encouraged me to avoid overly complicated staging and props. This was especially helpful for the investigation due to the lack of budget accessible to me. I wanted the performance and symbolism to become the focus rather than visual realism. Because the piece is based around the sun, moon and Earth, I experimented with keeping the actors mostly stationary to mimic the positioning of and movement of celestial bodies. I also explored physical distance between the performers to symbolise emotional separation and longing between the characters.

3.1.3 Practical Investigations

Within the practical investigation, I explored these ideas further through script drafts and experimenting in rehearsals. As seen within the first draft, there were a few minor mistakes, such as forgetting to put in key stage directions and wording that could have been phrased

more clearly. For example, I wrote “Dana, what’s up?” to which she replied “Yeah”. Small grammatical errors, such as this, are what could have really hindered the audience’s understanding. I also needed to add more symbolism to the play while simultaneously making the storyline clearer for the audience’s understanding. The only way I could think of doing this is by adding narration. I already decided that Dana, the Earth character, would be a narrator. However, I decided to add more dialogue throughout the piece. This dialogue would include more references towards tragic tales from mythology. For example, “The universe is made up of more than 2 trillion galaxies. The Milky Way alone has over 100 billion planets and stars. I am Dana. The earth. Your planet. And these are my best friends. They're pretty special to me. I couldn't live without them. Many have tried to write about their tales. Star-crossed lovers. Like Orpheus and Euridice. Pyramus and Thisbe. Aurora and Theia. The sun and the moon.” This is also a representation of the repetition that was used in my script, as the dialogue was reused at the end. This symbolised the repetitive cycle that the characters are living in, indicating that the story doesn’t end.

A lot of decisions were made within the rehearsal room. In the initial process, I guided the cast to do a full read-through of the script before we staged it. This helped me gain clarity on whether or not the dialogue made sense and if changes were needed. This inspired the changes from draft 1 to 2. I made sure that the cast was aware and felt comfortable with any changes to the script being made. We tested the staging that I had envisioned. Some movement proved not to be working due to timing issues, so that had to be adjusted accordingly. When the final draft of the script was complete, the cast gathered to annotate the script to gain a better understanding and notate any character decisions they may have made. The actors also helped

develop their own costumes. I provided a mood board for them to refer to, but they were able to make a creative choice in respect to what they believed the characters would wear.

After the process had ended, I requested that the cast fill out a survey on how they found the entire process. The first question that is asked is “How did you find the process of this play?”

One of the most analytical answers was “I felt the process was very clear and I had a clear understanding of the background and context surrounding the piece. Although, I would've liked to explore more with gestures, but the scripts had been in the way.” This is a fair comment to be made. The scripts were a big restriction for the actors, preventing them from having both hands available for expression.

If we had a longer process with more rehearsal time, it would have been easier for the actors to memorise their lines and give them more opportunity to physicalise their characters. I then asked, “Did you feel well equipped for the process?” to which I got a reply stating “Yes very well equipped I found that any questions concerns were answered. I felt very well prepared with the amount of time we had spent together working.” This indicates that communication throughout the process was clear, and I worked effectively in supporting the actors. I asked if they found the process well-organised and I received a reply saying “I feel as though, there should've been a more set schedule although we did come in. There was set things we had to do but not when we had to do them. Everything was well communicated and shared with us like the ideas for the characters, feedback after our rehearsals and times we had to rehearse”

With the circumstances surrounding the cast and the issues we had with scheduling, I managed rehearsal planning well. However, this feedback also suggests that a more structured schedule could have improved consistency. The final question was if the cast would like to work with me as a director again, and every cast member agreed they would.

3.1.4 Collaboration

During this process, I collaborated with a number of people. I worked with four of my peers overall. For my play, I needed three actors to play the characters. Based on my research of mythology, I originally believed the characters were going to be written as a man and woman. However, I envisioned them as women. I sought out my peers and friends who I felt were right for the piece. I was aware that my peers were involved in their own individual projects, so to make this process achievable, I decided to make the play a script-in-hand performance. I created a Microsoft Teams page as a form of communication. I used this page to organise rehearsals, communicate changes and be present for my cast in case of any queries or concerns.

One of my cast members struggles with dyslexia, so I made sure to accommodate them by offering a version of the script in green and a series of vocabulary in the phonetic alphabet. In the developing stages, I explained it as a romantic tragedy between the sun and the moon. I ensured my cast was comfortable with each other and were able to portray two lovers on stage. I also brought in a friend who is knowledgeable of dance to choreograph a small waltz at the end of my piece.

The general feedback from my cast was that they could understand the idea. Although, they asked about the cycle of the sun and moon, and why they meet. I had to explain the solar eclipse. The actors' interpretations of the characters were quite different to how I originally envisioned. The actor who played Dana was more casual than I thought when I was writing the dialogue. Aurora's actor also interpreted the character to be softer than I described. The cast helped me develop my ideas and workshop different approaches to the play. It was useful in the initial script read-through with the cast to see how the dialogue sounded aloud. This led me to make some small changes on the spot, such as:

- The actors were also very useful in bringing their own ideas to the space.
- Adding tone and gesture to the equation.
- It was interesting to see the actors' interpretations of the delivery of the lines.
- I sometimes struggled with remaining open-minded if the actors didn't deliver the lines as I envisioned.

My greatest challenge was time. I felt as though I could have used more time for a lot of various aspects of the project. This includes writing the script, editing, and staging. I also struggled with the scheduling due to clashes with the cast's other engagements. However, I also had trouble with time management and feel I should have been more organised within the process. Despite these challenges, the cast never misunderstood any of the script.

The general feedback was that the storyline was quite clear. There was a moment where the character Dana was feeling lost in the centre of the space. The idea behind it was that she was lost without the gravitational pull of Theia, the moon. The actor was unsure of how to deliver this and found it awkward without much of a narrative. I assisted by talking through the intention behind the dialogue.

After the discussion, the actor gained clarity and was able to portray the character's emotions during the scene. Once the actors were comfortable with the dialogue, I began running the play repeatedly. This is where I was able to add more detail to the performance. At the end of each run, I would read out my notes to the cast, and we would work them out in the space. At the end of each rehearsal, we would do a final run of the play to ensure that any added notes were embedded well into the actors' minds.

Following the initial challenges, the process began to run smoother. I would give notes to the cast when necessary. I would focus on spacing, projection, and tone to ensure that the story translated well for the audience.

The process made me more confident as a director. I received feedback from my peers that I was "very descriptive and hands-on." The positive feedback. Made me feel like my work was effective for the actors.

4. Production Planning

The greatest difficulty during the process was scheduling, as all my cast members had other projects to work on. Because of this, scheduling would clash, and we would often end up organising on the day when we were all available. When we reached the performance space for the tech rehearsal, I did not have any lighting or sound tech planned, as I originally planned to do a simplistic theatre piece that could be performed without a budget.

However, the lighting technician was already available and in the space for our assistance, so I discussed with them options for lighting. Useful decisions were made, such as the lighting becoming brighter when Aurora, the sun character, turns around to face the audience. I liked the lighting being quite dim, setting the scene that the characters are in space. However, the actors came across an issue with reading the script due to the lighting. Because of this, we had to brighten the lights, and I had to adjust their staging so that the cast were in positions that were in the stage lighting.

Video link to the production: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-KS8KSfYV2A>

5. Evaluation of the Final Outcome

By the end of the process and during the final performance, I achieved many aims that I set for myself. I developed directorial skills. Upon reflection, the script could have been longer.

Initially, I believed that the piece would last ten minutes. However, I underestimated that the actors would quicken their dialect in the event of performing in front of an audience. The script relied on a slower pace and frequent pauses but with the added element of nerves, a lot of these previous choices and directions were lost in the final performance.

Despite this, the cast appeared comfortable in their line delivery, which gave the impression that they were confident in what they were doing. This was helpful for the audience's understanding. At the end of the performance, a member of the audience turned to me and said, "That was very well written." This positive response reassured me that the project was successful in translating well for the audience's viewing. Confirming the fact that symbolism can, in fact, be used effectively in theatre.

6. Conclusion

Overall, this investigation explored the question “How can mythological symbolism be used in theatre to communicate themes of forbidden love and fate?” Through both research and practical experimentation, I found that mythology is a powerful tool for expressing emotional and universal themes within performance, particularly when combined with symbolic and abstract theatre styles. The research into practitioners such as Antonin Artaud, Jerzy Grotowski and Peter Brook helped shape my understanding of how symbolism, physical and minimal staging can be used to communicate meaning beyond realism. This was supported by my exploration of mythological and tragic texts such as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Pyramus and Thisbe*, which reinforced how themes of fate, separation and forbidden love are consistently present across different storytelling traditions.

Through the practical development of my piece, I found that symbolic storytelling can be effective in communicating emotional relationships, particularly using staging, movement, and narration. However, I also discovered that abstraction can sometimes make meaning unclear, and therefore additional narration and structural adjustments were needed to support audience understanding. In the future, I am planning on developing the play and extending it further to explore the possibilities of sharing symbolism in theatre with wider audiences. I may choose to present this practical investigation to a variety of target audiences, broadening the outcome of my findings.

In conclusion, this project demonstrated that mythological symbolism can successfully be used in theatre to explore complex emotional themes – but it also requires careful balance between abstraction and clarity to remain accessible to an audience.

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9. Appendices

Initial draft of the playtext:

400 years, 400 times

By

Issy Lane

Characters

DANA This the Earth Character and Narrator.
 She is grounded, observant, and bears
 emotional weight.

THEIA This is the Moon Character. She is
 feminine, tender, fair, graceful, and
 devoted.

Aurora This is the Sun Character. She is
 joyful, sweet, energetic, and
 headstrong.

SETTING

Set in space within the solar system. Three characters representing the sun, the moon, and the earth are in their set places that mimic the positions of the solar system.

TIME

Early morning at the beginning of the new moon phase

SCENE 1

DANA

The universe is made up of more than 2 trillion galaxies. The Milky Way alone has over 100 billion planets and stars. I am Dana. The earth. Your planet. And these are my best friends. They're pretty special to me. I couldn't live without them.

(Theia turns to face the audience)

THEIA

It's almost time. I'll be able to see her soon.

DANA

Yes, I know. You can every month. Too bad you can't reach her.

THEIA

(sarcastically) Thanks.

(Theia Freezes)

DANA

This is Theia, my luminescent, graceful friend, the moon. She's my closest friend. Literally.

...Theia? Are you with me?

THEIA

Hmm? Yeah, sorry. Just spaced out.

DANA

No worries. Is everything alright?

THEIA

Yeah, I guess so. I just feel like I'm drifting lately. How is she anyway? Does she talk about me?

DANA

About as much as you talk about her. She's cheerful as ever don't worry.

THEIA

She is?

DANA

How are you doing?

THEIA

I'm good. Yeah. I'm good actually. I feel like I'm entering a new phase in my life.

DANA

Good, I'm glad. No more going round in circles.

(Aurora Turns around and Theia freezes at the sight)

AURORA

Hey!

THEIA

(In wonder) ...Hey.

DANA

(shouts excitedly)

Hey girl, we missed you!

AURORA

Dana, you saw me yesterday.

(Dana dismisses her and both Aurora and Theia freeze)

DANA

This is Aurora. Our ball of energy. Miss Sunshine herself.

(They unfreeze after a beat)

AURORA

Theia.

Pause

THEIA

Hi.

(Aurora waves)

AURORA

You look as enchanting as I last saw you.

THEIA

Thank you. You look just as radiant-

Dana awkwardly coughs

I suppose it's time for me to sleep.

DANA

Alright, see you tomorrow

AURORA

Sweet dreams, Theia.

Theia turns around

SCENE 2

AURORA

(She sighs) well. Good morning!

DANA

Morning.

AURORA

It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

DANA

Aurora... Are you guys okay?

Aurora

Yes, of course (beat.) Why? Did she seem okay? Is there something wrong?

DANA

No, yeah. Everything's fine. She just misses you of course.

AURORA

...I miss her too.

Awkward silence

DANA

I'm sorry.

AURORA

Don't you dare. Both me and Theia would never choose to be together over your safety.

DANA

But surely, it won't be as bad as last time if she did reach you.

AURORA

It's too risky, Dana! We don't know what would happen to you if Theia moved from your Orbit.

DANA

Yeah, I guess you're right.

She goes to reach for Aurora, but Can't

You'll meet her soon. I promise

Aurora stays silent as she is visibly upset. They both turn away from each other

SCENE 3

Theia turns back around. Dana seems quite down in the dumps.

THEIA

Dana? What's up?

DANA

Yeah...

THEIA

I can feel something's wrong, Dana. Don't lie to me.

DANA

Nothing!

THEIA

What's wrong?!

DANA

Leave me be Theia. Please! I need space!

THEIA

Why are you doing this? You always try to push me away, but we're stuck together!

DANA

I know! I can't survive without you and Aurora surrounding me all the time!

THEIA

So, what's your issue?

DANA

You're always just there! Every single day and night! I never get any time for myself!

THEIA

(takes a deep breath) you're not thinking clearly, Dana.

DANA

Stop! Stop being all high and mighty! Sitting there pretending you're doing wonders for me just for existing. I'm clearly just a big burden on you. If it weren't for me, you could see your precious sunshine every day!

THEIA

That doesn't matter Dana-

DANA

It does! It does matter! Because I know that you would rather see her every night over me.

THEIA

That's not true-

DAN

Oh, but it is! And I would much rather be stuck in complete darkness than to see you another night.'

Pause

Theia sniffles then runs towards Aurora, and instantly it knocks the wind out of Dana

SCENE 4

AURORA

Theia? What are you doing? How-

Theia hugs her tight

Theia, what happened?

THEIA

I'm so sorry sunshine

AURORA

Dana...

Dana groans in pain, holding her stomach tightly

Dana!

THEIA

I'm so sorry, I-I just needed to see you and she- I'm so sorry.

Aurora holds her hand as comfort

AURORA

Calm down my love. It's okay. But you know she can't hold when we're this close

THEIA (Distraught)

Aurora... I've disrupted everything. Dana. she...

AURORA

It's okay, Theia. She's strong. But you need to go back to her.

They embrace each other and hold their foreheads together. Theia walks backwards slowly, back towards her original place. Meanwhile, Dana is looking around, lost in the darkness, searching for light. Theia stops by Dana.

DANA

Theia? Please! Where are you? I'm sorry! Come back to me please...I can't see!

THEIA

Dana.

Dana notices Theia, sighs in relief and holds her hands

DANA

Theia! Thank you so much!

THEIA

I'm so sorry, Dana.

DANA

No, I am. I never meant for you to leave. I just felt completely flooded. But it was nothing compared to when you left.

THEIA

I promise I'll never do that to you again. But I do need to go back now,

Dana Nod and motions for her to go. Theia Steps back into her original space.

SCENE 5

DANA/THEIA (In Unison)

I'm so sorry!

THEIA

Are you okay?

DANA

I am now. I shouldn't have crashed out at you. I know you were just looking out for me.

THEIA

Of course I was, I always will.

DANA

Did you see Aurora?

Aurora nods

That's great!

Theia and Aurora start slowly walking in their own independent circles, replicating the solar system.

DANA

What was it like? Finally, seeing her, I mean.

THEIA

It was out of this world! I haven't seen her in almost 400 years-

Theia and Aurora bump into each other back-to-back

AURORA

(gasps)has it been...

THEIA

400 years!

They embrace and freeze holding one another

DANA (To Audience)

Of course. How could we have forgotten. Their anniversary. The solar eclipse. Every 400 years despite being 400 times further than I, they align.

Theia and Aurora come out of their embrace and face each other

AURORA

And I'll wait a million more just to see you

THEIA

I would wait 5 billion.

AURORA

I love you, my moon

THEIA

And back.

They begin to part, reaching out for one another. And stay frozen as the final image.

Final draft of the playtext:

400 years, 400 times

By

Issy Lane

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(Theia turns to face the audience)

THEIA

It's almost time. I'll be able to see her soon.

DANA

Yes, I know. You can every month. Too bad you can't reach her.

THEIA

(sarcastically) Thanks.

(Theia Freezes)

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THEIA

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DANA

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THEIA

She is?

DANA

How are you doing?

THEIA

I'm good. Yeah. I'm good actually. I feel like I'm entering a new phase in my life.

DANA

Good, I'm glad. No more going round in circles.

(Aurora Turns around and Theia freezes at the sight)

AURORA

Hey!

THEIA

(In wonder) ...Hey.

DANA

(shouts excitedly)

Hey girl, we missed you!

AURORA

Dana, you saw me yesterday.

(Dana dismisses her and both Aurora and Theia freeze)

DANA

This is Aurora. Our ball of energy. Miss Sunshine herself.

(They unfreeze after a beat)

AURORA

Theia.

Pause

THEIA

Hi.

(Aurora waves)

AURORA

You look as enchanting as I last saw you.

THEIA

Thank you. You look just as radiant-

Dana awkwardly coughs

I suppose it's time for me to sleep.

DANA

Alright, see you tomorrow

AURORA

Sweet dreams, Theia.

Theia turns around

SCENE 2

DANA

So that's them the great planets themselves. Now the moon has gone to rest, and the sun casts her light for the morning.

AURORA

(She sighs) well. Good morning!

DANA

Morning.

AURORA

It's a beautiful day, isn't it?

DANA

Aurora... Are you guys okay?

Aurora

Yes, of course (beat.) Why? Did she seem okay? Is there something wrong?

DANA

No, yeah. Everything's fine. She just misses you of course.

AURORA

...I miss her too.

DANA

I bet. You are 400 times further from her.

DANA

I'm sorry.

AURORA

For What?

DANA

For the bleak reminder... and being the cause

AURORA

Don't you dare. Both me and Theia would never choose to be together over your safety.

DANA

But surely, it won't be as bad as last time if she did reach you.

AURORA

It's too risky, Dana! We don't know what would happen to you if Theia moved from your Orbit.

DANA

Yeah, I guess you're right.

She goes to reach for Aurora, but Can't

You'll meet her soon. I promise

Aurora stays silent as she is visibly upset. They both turn away from each other

DANA

...Well. That went well. So, Aurora and Theia. They keep me grounded. I rely on them. But there's a cost.

SCENE 3

Theia turns back around. Dana seems quite down in the dumps.

THEIA

Dana? What's up? Are you okay?

DANA

Yeah...

THEIA

I can feel something's wrong, Dana. Don't lie to me.

DANA

Nothing!

THEIA

What's wrong?!

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I know! I can't survive without you and Aurora surrounding me all the time!

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That doesn't matter Dana-

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It does! It does matter! Because I know that you would rather see her every night over me.

THEIA

That's not true-

DANA

Oh, but it is! And I would much rather be stuck in complete darkness than to see you another night.'

Pause

Theia sniffles then runs towards Aurora, and instantly it knocks the wind out of Dana. They all froze. Theia and Aurora holding each other and Dana hunched over in pain. Dana addresses the audience.

DANA

Not my most grounded moment, I know.

She returns to being hunched over in pain and lost.

SCENE 4

AURORA

Theia? What are you doing? How-

Theia hugs her tight

Theia, what happened?

THEIA

I'm so sorry sunshine

AURORA

Dana...

Dana groans in pain, holding her stomach tightly

Dana!

THEIA

I'm so sorry, I-I just needed to see you and she- I'm so sorry.

Aurora holds her hand as comfort

AURORA

Calm down my love. It's okay. But you know she can't hold when we're this close

THEIA (Distracted)

Aurora... I've disrupted everything. Dana. she...

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They embrace each other and hold their foreheads together. Theia walks backwards slowly, back towards her original place. Meanwhile, Dana is looking around, lost in the darkness, searching for light. Theia stops by Dana.

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Dana notices Theia, sighs in relief and holds her hands

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Dana Nod and motions for her to go. Theia Steps back into her original space.

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Theia and Aurora come out of their embrace and face each other

AURORA

And I'll wait a million more just to see you

THEIA

I would wait 5 billion.

AURORA

I love you, my moon

THEIA

And back.

Aurora and Theia begin to waltz

DANA

...But fate is set. They are destined to be apart. The star-crossed lovers. Like Orpheus and Euridice. Pyramus and Thisbe. Aurora and Theia. The sun and the moon.

Aurora and Theia begin to part, reaching out for one another. And stay frozen as the final image.

END.

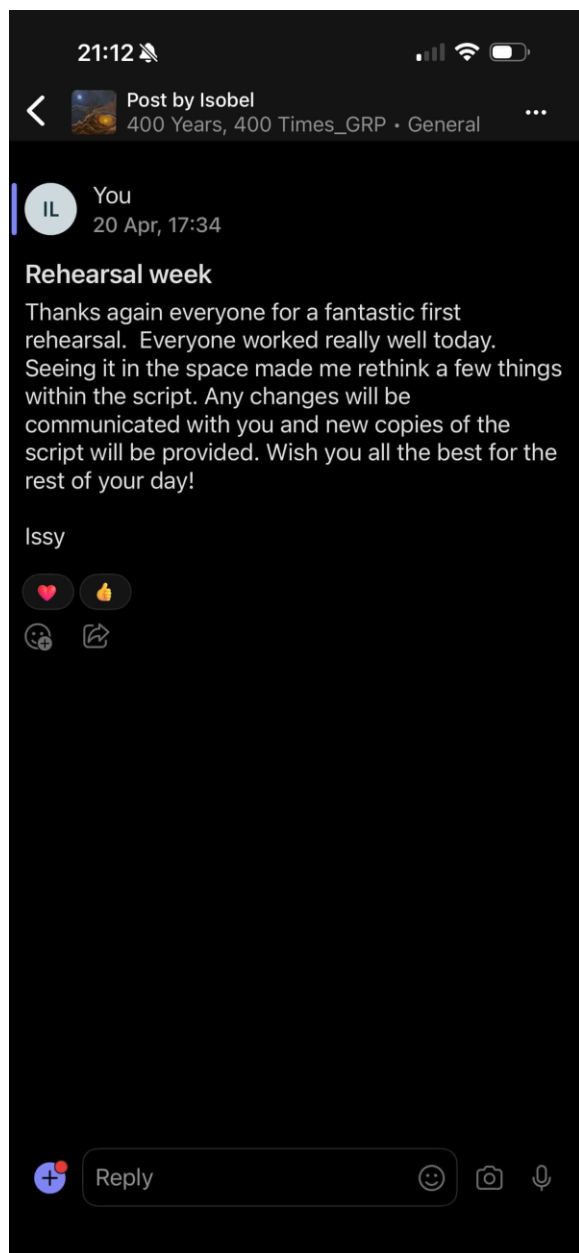
Images documenting the rehearsal process





Poster for the performance and images of rehearsal arrangements, and costumes









DANA - PERFORMED BY AIMEE
VILLIS



THEIA - PERFORMED BY EMILY
MEREDITH



AURORA - PERFORMED BY HOLLY
BRAIN



CHOREOGRAPHED BY LIV HARRIS

LIGHTING AND SOUND BY LIZ

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY ISSY LANE

