

Kimberley Sykes is a theatre director who has directed a variety of stage works over the last ten years. She has worked with several theatre companies including the RSC, the Donmar Warehouse and the National Theatre. In this interview she discusses her role as director of the 2017 RSC production of *Dido, Queen of Carthage*.

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<http://www.open.ac.uk/arts/research/pvcrs/2019/sykes>

Jan Haywood: I am talking today to theatre director, Kimberley Sykes. I wonder if you could start, Kimberley, by telling me a little bit about your background and, in particular, how it is that you came to put on this adaptation of Marlowe's *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, a play that much less performed than most of Shakespeare's plays, for example.

Kimberley Sykes: Yes, absolutely. I first worked for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 2012 as an assistant director. I was working on the World Shakespeare Festival. And then in 2016 I was asked to be an associate director on *A Midsummer Night's Dream – A Play for the Nation*, which was an enormously ambitious project, a true play for the nation where we cast Bottom and the mechanicals with amateur theatre companies all around the UK. We had a professional cast of 18, something like 86 amateur actors, and over 500 children from schools around the United Kingdom playing Titania's fairy train.

That was an enormous task and a two-year project where, as an associate director, I was given the opportunity really to stretch myself, to spread my wings. I was given the opportunity to be able to run my own rehearsal room in conjunction with Erica Whyman, who was the director and the deputy artistic director at the RSC, with her vision for the piece. [Really it] was a highly collaborative process and it was from my work on that huge project that Erica and Greg Doran, the artistic director, then came up with the idea of me directing my own play for the Royal Shakespeare Company and in this situation it was *Dido, Queen of Carthage* that they asked me to read.

What's brilliant about the Royal Shakespeare Company is that, you know, for young directors sometimes it's about applying for awards, it becomes a competition, so you get that first big gig out of the competition. And that's something that for me I've never been massively comfortable with. So it felt really right for my process as a director to get my first big gig from working. Most of my jobs have come from the previous job I've done before.

JH: That must be very rewarding.

KS: I much prefer it that way – recommendations and people kind of saying, 'oh, I like the way you work, let's push that further'. So I really appreciate that in the Royal Shakespeare Company. And it was Greg and Erica who had *Dido, Queen of Carthage* in their back pockets for quite a while. They were looking for plays in The Swan that could be connected to the Rome season but that weren't Roman plays. And so *Dido, Queen of Carthage* fitted really nicely into that. Greg asked me to read it and see if I connected with it. I went home that weekend and read the play and cried my heart out

in the kitchen and got really angry and went back and said ‘yes, I do, I do bloody connect with it, let’s do it!’.

JH: Related to this (and the way that you’ve explained about how Greg and Erica played a role will slightly inflect my question), it’s clear from your biography that you’ve worked on quite a lot of Shakespearean material in the past, haven’t you? For example, you directed *Macbeth* at the Ovalhouse Theatre. But it seems to me that this is your first foray into more classical material.

KS: Yes.

JH: Did you have an existing interest in classical antiquity and the literature of the classical world?

KS: I really didn’t. When I first read the play I wondered what they were talking about. I didn’t have that kind of education; I never studied Latin; I never studied classics. But as a director that really, really thrills me and it really excites me because, you know, you can do a play about anything and become a kind of rookie pro in a particular subject. As a director, I love educating myself and delving into worlds and experiences previously unknown to me. You end up carrying a weight of knowledge for that period of time but then inevitably you have to make room for the next project and so some of it leaves you. However, certain things remain and these begin to form who you are as a director and what matters to you. I really threw myself into the classics in preparation for *Dido*, *Queen of Carthage* and carry the power of mythology with me to this very day.

JH: I see; could you tell me more, then, about your rehearsal process? As you say, you were throwing yourself into this material which is initially unfamiliar.

KS: We started by working out what the names or the references meant – with the approach that I think it’s impossible to expect an audience to understand every single reference in the play. But we as a company have to understand every reference. It has to feel like our first language because that’s how it’s written. The play is set somewhere around 800 BCE, so we really have to address the language and I believe that language is the texture of any play. So, for example, I spent a really long time putting together a reference document that everybody in the rehearsal room had that we could look through and kind of go, okay, so on page 3 there is a reference to Aeolus. Who was Aeolus? And so we looked through and it became, like, a bible for us about working out who these people were.

We also created a family tree in the room just to try and work out how the gods and the mortals were related to each other. Because the world of the play is one where the gods and the mortals share, you know, they’re connected through family. And we have demigods and gods and then mortals, so we began by putting Jupiter at the top of that tree and then worked out how people were related from there. So Venus is his daughter; Juno is his wife; Ganymede is the young boy he kidnaps from Troy. Ganymede is suddenly a Trojan in relation to Aeneas, but Aeneas is Venus’ son and then Ascanius is Aeneas’ son and so therefore Venus’ grandson. And so we created on the wall this massive family tree of connections between all the characters in the play to help us understand how they all relate to each other.

JH: That’s fabulous. Did you find that the actors and the crew were very in touch with that tree? Did that form a key space in the rehearsal room that you all went back to, then?

KS: Yes and no, in that we spent nearly two days creating the family tree. Now, if it was just to create the tree as a thing to go back to in rehearsals, we could have done it in an hour. But it took two days because it was the process of doing it that helped us ... by talking about it, by asking questions, by working out how characters relate to each other. So the family tree becomes a way in which to focus the conversation. But it was definitely the process of making it that we got most out of as a company.

JH: It sounds almost like osmosis – that through the process there was a fundamental development of how everyone perceived the material.

KS: Yes.

JH: If I can move on slightly to some of the design choices of the play, I should note that a particularly striking thing was the use of sound on the stage, which I presume was to indicate that this was set in North Africa, in ancient Carthage – modern day Tunisia. Could you say a bit more about some of those choices?

KS: I started the process with Ti Green, who designed the set. Probably about nearly a year before going into rehearsals. We sat down and brainstormed some ideas and looked at some of the recurring language in the play. I would just go and write down every word that was uttered on a big sheet of paper in a big book ... it starts to help you understand what a scene is about when, for example, you see love mentioned 50 times. You know? We really need to have a conversation about love.

And the big one for me in the play was the word ‘shore’. Marlowe mentions it something like 48 times. Shakespeare in the whole of the canon only uses it roughly 62 times. Marlowe fits the word ‘shore’ into this play a lot, and so I asked this question: what does shore mean? Shore then becomes a very interesting metaphor for the meeting place between two things – so whether that’s gods and mortals, east and west, sea and land, male and female. And also the shore is the space between those two things – it’s not one or the other. The shore is this very liminal space.

JH: Absolutely!

KS: And I think that’s very dramatic – that becomes a very big, dramatic idea. It made me think about Mark Rothko, and when you look at a Rothko painting you see these two colours ... but the most interesting part of a Rothko painting is the bit in the middle where the two colours meet. That’s where life happens; that’s where urgency happens; that’s where love happens. And so the sand became a physical and emotional metaphor for all of us in that to put a company of actors on a stage of sand is immediately to put them in a place of a shifting state, of unpredictability, that you can’t quite get your foot in. It’s not solid ground.

JH: That’s wonderful, Kimberley. And it literally adds a strong element of dynamism and uncertainty in each individual performance ... there’s an element of improvisation, even in the most well-rehearsed of performances, because, as you say, sand is a shifting thing that the actors can never fully prepare for.

KS: Yes – absolutely. You don’t quite know. The whole space is an organic, living thing. The sand changes in temperature because we have a huge Kanye West-inspired lighting rig hanging over the top of the thrust. And when that’s on full blast the sand is really hot; so when the company is walking on the sand under the lights it is like being on a hot Mediterranean coast. But then as soon as we turn the water curtain on, because the water curtain is cold, suddenly the whole space changes in temperature and the other element of unpredictability is that you can never know what the

audience is going to bring to that. If we've got a really full house, that affects the temperature in the room as well. So I love that idea of the company walking on stage every night and the environment being organic, and it allows their performances also to shift and be organic. And the same with the musicians ... the reason why I chose Mike Fletcher, who's a jazz composer and musician, is to add that element to the musical landscape as well of, yes, we have a structure but where is the space within that structure to be able to respond and listen and improvise and discover something new every single night.

JH: That's really interesting. And yes, the music was something that really struck me too. Again, that unpredictability – it does weave in very nicely, as you say. I wonder if you could also say something about the costume, since the costumes in the play are so rich and really contribute towards the setting of the drama as well.

KS: Having such a strict back space as grey sand and a water curtain and not very much else ... part of the reason for that was because whenever a character walks on stage, any costume that they bring into the space, any prop that they bring into the space, they talk about it. You really feel like Marlowe is writing a play where items and things are very present. For example, if somebody brings a quiver and a bow, they don't just wear them; they talk about these items. They say look at my quiver and they describe it. They take great pleasure in things. It was very important to us that the costume and the props had a depth and an authenticity and specificity that made them iconic. Indeed, Marlowe is obsessed with gifts and items, and giving things to other people. And Carthage was well known for the colour purple and this purple dye that was its strongest export. The thing that made the Carthaginians the most money was this purple dye. Carthage was a very successful trading post, so it lends itself to this idea of the shore and things coming and things going; almost that the whole world moves through Carthage. So we really wanted to make sure that we give full weight and theatricality to each and every item that was brought on stage.

JH: I wondered if you had any thoughts on this idea of Marlowe being a sort of aesthete of objects. It was something that struck me throughout the play – that things were rather elaborated on. Indeed, in antiquity there is this literary technique known as *ekphrasis*, in which a work of visual art will receive a detailed verbal description. It almost feels like Marlowe is doing a similar thing.

KS: Yes: when you read up on Marlowe's upbringing, there's evidence of his mother as a collector of things. They weren't very wealthy but what they had was really very fine. In his mother's will, each item in the house is described in immense detail. For instance, the quality of the silver, the carvings in the silverware; they describe her jewellery in great detail. And when you think about the Elizabethan culture as well, I guess there is this sense of having ownership of special treasured possessions. So when Dido talks about the things she will give to the Trojans to repair their ships, she talks about anchors made out of crystal that will light up in the sea so they'll never be lost. And the sails: Dido says that will embroider the sails with all the wonders of Troy. They meditate upon these offerings and these gifts and these items in a way that we just don't anymore – that we're complacent about now. There's a relish of things that I think is really exciting to put on stage.

JH: That's wonderful ... 'relish of things'. I wonder if we could think a bit more about some aspects of characterisation in the play? The gods in your production are very modern. Hermes, the messenger god, is rather amusingly clad in designer clobber – a king of visual pun on the French designer brand, I presume?

KS: Yes.

JH: I wonder if you could say more, then, on why you chose to portray these gods of the ancient world in contemporary attire?

KS: I think it was one of the most challenging aspects of the whole production: how do you show the gods when so few writers put them on the stage. Shakespeare, I think, only actually does it once, and it's in his final play – *The Tempest*. He finally puts Juno on stage. Before that he talks a lot about them [the gods] but he never actually makes them real. I don't really know of any other play where the gods are that present and are that real. And so that was really difficult because you say 'gosh, there's a reason why no other writer has put the gods on stage in quite that way'. I was fascinated by where they come from – like the invention of the gods themselves. I'm not religious. We know that Marlowe was a passionate atheist. And so it made me ask the question: 'how did they come about, and how do we use them?'. So I think they're used for the most difficult things that are really tough for human beings to answer ... there's no science for love. Well, nowadays somebody's probably worked out what hormones are being sent through your body and there's probably a scientific equation for the feeling of love. But it's such a difficult thing to come to terms with, so we use the metaphor of a god: Cupid. That's what happened. I was hit by Cupid's arrow. To try and come to terms or explain some of the bits of life where we get stuck.

I was really interested in what these pagan gods mean to a modern audience and I wanted the audience to be able to identify with the gods in some way because they are versions of ourselves. I liked the idea that the gods always are represented as the audience – that they reflect the audience and they need to reflect us. Aspects of our own personalities, aspects of ourselves, exactly those things that we find most difficult to come to terms with. So that inspired the idea that the gods should be modern but also the relationship between the theatre and the audience and the mortal realm and the realm of the Olympian gods and how we do that in the theatre. And so, for example, the fourth wall and that being something that doesn't exist for gods – the gods are limitless; they're not confined by the fourth wall. They're more metatheatrical than that; they can talk to the audience; they always know the audience is there; they can manipulate the theatre. But for the mortals in the play they exist behind the fourth wall in this kind of imagined reality that then helps enormously as we come to the end of the play, when the mortals start to challenge the gods and see through the fourth wall and become aware of the mechanics of the theatre and the mechanics of the world.

JH: Yes. A good example of that, I think, is where you have your Cupid striking Dido with his bow, although his bow and arrow is replaced with a needle – perhaps a heroin needle? There's lots going on there. I thought in one way it was a bit of fun and sort of made sense to a modern audience, but it was also more profound inasmuch that it was actually commenting on an aspect of our culture, about addiction, that this is something which surrounds us (not to mention how we still conceive as love as a drug).

KS: And that particular choice came out of a conversation about Venus with the company and, in particular, with Ellie Beaven, who plays Venus. We were talking about what it is to be a goddess of love – a goddess of desire and love and the image of that and what it costs the gods to be able to use their power. Ellie was interested in the pain of being the goddess of love – especially when you look back at mythology

and realise that Venus is in a forced marriage with Vulcan and the relationship she has had prevented by Jupiter. Her relationship with Mars – she was punished for her relationship with him; the same with Apollo. She hasn't had much success at love in her own life and yet the world depends on her to give it to them. So we really hit upon this idea that Venus has love running through her veins. She is love; she embodies love; her blood is love; therefore, Cupid has to get his arrow from Venus. In mythology, Venus gives Cupid the thing; they don't just come from anywhere. They come from Venus and she gives them to Cupid. He's just the distributor of the love. So where does that come from and what does that cost her? And so therefore if it's a hypodermic needle that's literally taking blood and she has a plug, literally a plug socket in her, that she has to live with all day every day, it costs her every time she has to give it. I wanted to reflect the pain stemming from the responsibility of being a god of something as well.

JH: Gosh. So much of what you say about the pain and the responsibility of being Venus makes me think of Dido. This is, of course, an ensemble production but, nonetheless, Dido, played by Chipo Chung in your production, is clearly central. I thought that she brought a great sense of timing to her performance, indeed, her closing scene, once Aeneas has fled, is quiet yet devastating. Did you have Chipo in mind from the beginning for this role?

KS: Yes. I met Chipo, and we read some scenes from the play together. She was somebody who immediately commanded a room. The first time that she walked into a room that I was in I could believe that this woman is a founding queen. Dido experienced exile herself. She fled her home nation when her brother was plotting her murder and she set sail to sea and came upon the Libyan shore and founded her own nation from scratch. And so that takes quite a special person to be able to convincingly carry that. It's not about being regal ... I don't like that. No, I'm not interested in whether somebody can convincingly play a high-status individual. I'm interested in a person's history and how they wear that, how they carry that in their body, their voice, their mind and in their heart. And that comes across very powerfully with Chipo in terms of her political activism and her awareness of different worlds. She has a wonderfully complex background that allows her to be able to identify with the other, but, at the same time, really to place the other as the founder. So, I didn't want Dido to feel like an 'other'. And often when women are portrayed on stage or sometimes when characters of different ethnic or racial backgrounds are portrayed on stage, they're portrayed with this attitude of the other or the foreigner, whereas, actually, in this play it's the opposite way around – Dido is the founder and so she is the centre. She is absolutely at the centre of the entire play and Chipo carries that off with such ease.

JH: And the play is produced in the late 16th century, yes? Is it 1593?

KS: It's debatable. Some people say 1585; others say 1588.

JH: Okay. So late 16th century. A crucial context therefore is that there is a female monarch and we cannot lose sight of that, I think. But, nonetheless, I wonder whether you had any thoughts on the portrayal of a woman, Dido, as a successful leader. And you've really articulated for us very clearly how she is. Do you think the image of a strong, successful female leader from the point of view of somebody in 1588 was perhaps less immediately relatable than it is today?

KS: Yes. I think Dido's story is a really exciting one, because it's pre-Roman. And so therefore it's kind of pre-patriarchal. Indeed, it's interesting the point in history in which Jupiter rises to power ... before that, the gods were very much feminine. So Juno, the many versions of Juno as the goddess, as the kind of lead goddess, as such, was much, much more prevalent than male gods. There was a matriarchy that was just widely accepted. Female leaders were not actually as rare as possibly even today. And I guess there is an argument that the point at which Aeneas leaves, abiding by Jupiter's wishes – demands. They're not wishes; he demands him. And goes to found Italy with his son, Ascanius ... that's the point at which a lot of men took over the world. I think we might be coming full circle now, back to something more feminine. Not feminine in a kind of tokenistic way, but rather genuinely, collaboratively, feminine-rooted and strong.

So, yes, I think Elizabeth is very interesting. And specifically when we look at the fact that there was a real issue with who was going to be her successor, exactly at this point. She was coming towards the end of her life and she had no heir. It was a really big problem for Elizabethans at this time – what was going to happen when she died. It was illegal to talk about Elizabeth's death, it was illegal to think about Elizabeth's death, and it was illegal to dream about Elizabeth's death. So it was really quite bold of Marlowe to have his Dido die on the stage.

JH: I can't help but wonder whether it's telling, or in any way informative, that your production of *Dido* is being performed in 2017, at a time when the current British monarch is also quite elderly and there have been on-going national conversations about succession – whether there will be an ordinary transition to Charles or whether William, Elizabeth's grandson, might succeed the throne ...

KS: Yes, but we have a different relationship with the monarchy now, don't we? Less dependent upon the royal family. I think it is interesting to look at Dido and how active she is as a monarch. We see her at the beginning of the play bringing food, aid and refuge to the refugees. She does it herself. She's not telling other people to do it. She's very practical. She's very hands-on as a monarch. Her behaviour and her actions directly influence and affect the nation and everybody around her. Again, at the end of the play when Aeneas has left, she has acted in a way that has put her nation at enormous risk – she's politically trapped at the end of the play; she's given away her crown. She has changed the political landscape of North Africa forever. And she needs to find a way out. She has to do something, because her actions have a direct consequence. I'm not sure whether that's the case for our royal family today.

JH: Yes, I agree very much. Now, you've talked a few times about one of the other core characters in the play – Aeneas – who is played by Sandy Grierson. Aeneas is a very complex character, because I think he is genuinely in love with Dido, and he appears to be contented, at least from my point of view, with staying in Carthage and having his new Troy, having fled from the burning pillars of Troy. But the gods won't accept this; they demand that he goes back out into the sea, sailing towards Italy. Even so, I suspect a lot of audience members may nonetheless be shocked by the way that he rejects Dido in favour of sailing out in order to appease the gods. What are your thoughts were on that aspect of the story?

KS: Yes, I think it's really tough. I think Sandy Grierson is a genius because Aeneas has been depicted throughout history as spineless, as fickle, as an abandoner of women. And yet his political responsibilities that are coming from Jupiter – for example, the responsibility to found a new civilisation and a new nation for Troy.

That's a really big thing for somebody to do and that's a really admirable sacrifice for one to make – to sacrifice one's personal happiness in order to fulfil a society's needs, in order to take his fellow Trojans and safely negotiate their passage through the Mediterranean and help them found a new home – a new life and a new identity. And of course – I agree – I think he's completely in love with Dido and he's not poisoned by Cupid's arrow; he is genuinely in love with Dido. So his decision is very difficult. I think there is no easy answer to that ... And what was important to me, Sandy, Chipo and the whole company was that we didn't try and simplify that. As a refugee he speaks in devastating language for 20 minutes when he first arrives in Carthage about the fall of Troy. Young infants swimming in their parents' blood; virgins half dead, dragged by their hair. He has experienced something that none of us can really say that we have or that we have seen. So I didn't want to judge Aeneas and I didn't want the audience to judge him purely based on the fact that he left this woman; there's a lot more to it than that.

JH: Absolutely.

KS: Until you can say, yes, I know how it feels to have my nation and my identity and my family, my wife, my entire people, raped and murdered and destroyed in front of my eyes, I don't think we can really judge him in his decision to leave Carthage when he does.

JH: From my point of view, anyway, your production wholly succeeds with that. I'm always inclined to judge Aeneas, but yes, I really felt your performance allowed the audience to see through Aeneas' eyes. It enabled the audience genuinely to engage with both perspectives – that of Dido and that of Aeneas.

KS: Yes.

JH: Moving away from Dido and Aeneas, another thing that really struck me about your production was the way that, before the play began proper, gods were discoursing with audience members. Indeed, I remember that Juno came over to speak towards my seat and was being a bit of a pain, actually – she was sort of getting in people's way, asking facetious questions, etc. And I recall Hermes running around the back of the stage. What influence do you think that this might have had on audience perceptions of what your play was going to be about?

KS: Yes: I wanted it to be playful. It's tragic. It's a tragedy but there's also a lot of humour in the play and so I didn't want to pre-empt the end of the play at the beginning. There's something about setting up the gods and the mischief and creating lots of bubbling conversations and the idea that the audience is not going to be ignored in this space. Attending the theatre is a participatory act, being an audience member should not be passive.

Marlowe begins the play with the gods – Jupiter, Ganymede ... Hermes is on stage, Venus comes on. We have this scene with Juno; Cupid is there quite early. So we get this early presence of the gods and at the end of the play they're gone. They abandon the mortals; they abandon the theatre. My idea with the beginning of the play or the beginning of the theatrical experience with the audience was to fill the theatre with the gods so that by the end of the play when the gods have absolutely disappeared, we're reminded of their presence by their lack of presence.

JH: And I suppose mirroring that, then, is that you spoke meaningfully before about the fourth wall and at the beginning of the play the fourth wall is totally broken down

– there’s a kind of Brechtian thing going on there, is there not, where the audience kind of become an extension of the performance and vice versa?

KS: Yes.

JH: But then as you say, at the end, and I hadn’t fully reflected on it until now, the fourth wall aspect is diminished. That strikes me as a very interesting development over the course of the performance.

KS: Yes, it’s interesting. Dido has the line about Anna, her sister, who says to her, ‘leave these idle fantasies; remember who you are’. And Dido says Dido I am, unless I be deceived. And you just really get this sense that this woman is starting to become aware of the mechanics surrounding her world and really beginning to question who these gods are and what their intentions are ... what might be behind the fourth wall. And so that’s kind of the point where she really talks to us and we perceive that she’s starting to break through the mirror, whatever that means for us today.

Whatever the constructs that we place around our lives that make us feel safe or that make us live in a kind of blissful ignorance, that she’s just starting to break that down and see a bit more clearly and take control. She starts to have agency and make her own decisions and change the course of history, not allowing that to be something that’s exclusively the right of the gods but that a human being can do that as well. So I think by the end of the play the whole concept of the fourth wall and the relationship between actor and audience and theatre and responsibility and whether we sit in our dark seat and passively observe the world or whether we start to feel like we, by just being in that room, by just being in the theatre, we are an active participant in what’s happening on the stage.

JH: Almost that we are Dido?

KS: Yes. And can you sit by and watch this? We’ve had near stage invasions – people who don’t know the play really feeling a need to try and stop it, to try and stop Dido self-immolating. And you see it slowly dawn on people in the audience what she’s going to do ... and I think we have to look at what’s happening in the world. It didn’t go unnoticed by us that the Arab Spring was begun by a Tunisian fruit seller self-immolating in a marketplace. Immolation itself is a political act: it’s about making a statement. It’s about having an audience. Nobody immolates in private. You immolate as a political act, in front of an audience. And why? Because you want to change the world. I think that’s something that I feel very passionate about the audience identifying with and feeling for; are you just going to sit there and watch someone do this?

JH: Certainly, I can second that it is genuinely difficult for your audience to be passive and sit there. As I said before, when Chipu performs this act, it’s devastating for the audience to sit there and I think it really does draw out acutely the ideas that you’ve spoken so much about – about the status of refugees and the impact of these decisions. Some are kind of inescapable decisions, I think, and maybe that’s what the gods are there to represent – the impact that it has on them.

I wonder if we could finish by thinking about movement. Here we have a play that was written in the 1500s, and very much based on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, an epic poem written in Latin in the first century BCE. But the *Aeneid* itself is actually built on pre-existing story traditions that go back to the *Iliad* – a Greek epic poem that was sung orally from the eighth century BCE, an instantiation of older sets of oral traditions that are going back a few hundred years even before the eighth century. There is this

extremely long story tradition and I'm very much interested in that as a researcher – the way that myth kind of gets taken up, repurposed, and built on, in order to make sense of things. And we've spoken quite a bit about making sense anew in new cultural contexts. Do you have any thoughts on your production as a re-imagining that is part of this process of telling of stories anew?

KS: Of course. It felt important that this with the case with the gods. I think reinventing the gods is so exciting and really necessary. Why put them on stage if we don't feel like we can relate to them in some way? Where it feels like a bigger responsibility is for the mortals and, as human beings, taking into consideration the legacy of myth and the history of stories and, at different points, different people have taken all of the myths that you've just talked about in the forms of narrative and storytelling and tried to use them for their own purposes.

So, perhaps Virgil was using Dido's story as a way to legitimise Augustus' reign as emperor in Rome. And at each point throughout history, the Romans are taking the Greek gods and renaming them and making them their own. And at each point you feel like these storytellers are trying to kind of say, such and such begins here. We have ownership of this. But I think one should always acknowledge a debt to what's come before. And I hope we've done that in the production – yes, to make it feel very urgent and very new but also, at the same time, to pay respect to other, more ancient forms of storytelling.

Tunisia is a perfect example of that. When Chipo was travelling in Tunisia and she asked people there what Dido meant to them, they said that Dido is their beginning, and we are returning to her now. Since Dido, several political powers and nations and armies and forces have gone into Tunisia and claimed it as their own and many invasions and wars have really complicated Tunisia's identity. Hence a lot of the people she spoke to there would say that Dido is the nation's founder; Dido is where they begin. I think it's important to pay homage to that, and that's what I hope we've done in the production – it's to give her, as Marlowe gives Dido her own voice at the end of the play, to make sure we know whose story it is and whose voice we're listening to and to put ownership of this tale that has been manipulated for other people's purposes throughout history, and just really place it very firmly in Dido's hands.

JH: Well, thank you very much for speaking with me today, Kimberley.