

Molora

★★★★ The Pit, London

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In The Oresteia, Elektra, the daughter of Agamemnon and Klytemnestra is raised as a servant in her dead father's house as she awaits the return of her brother, Orestes. The pair are determined to take revenge on Klytemnestra for her vengeful slaying of her husband. Yael Farber's hard, grief-filled production transposes the story to the present-day rural Xhosa community in South Africa to examine the cycle of violence and vengeance, and to ask whether, in such circumstances, forgiveness is ever possible. It is a performance characterised by ritual, with the mesmerising, deep-throated split tone singing of the Ngqoko Cultural Group. Ash that falls like rain is reminiscent not just of the victims of apartheid, but of other holocausts, too.

The framing device that pits mother opposite daughter at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission feels a little forced, but the piece has all the spare savagery of Greek tragedy as the white, gumboot-wearing Klytemnestra subjects her black daughter to the apartheid-era, "wet bag" torture. With intransigence and silence her only weapons, Jabulile Tshabalala's watchful Elektra bides her time until vengeance can be hers. But the outstanding performance is from Dorothy Ann Gould as the troubled, hard-drinking queen whose real punishment is that she knows, through her actions, she has destroyed her very humanity. "The darkness is in your eyes. You have become me," she warns Elektra as the latter prepares her murderous revenge.

A sand-covered grave and an axe set the visual tone for an evening that is stark, dark and bloody, and if there are occasional moments when the action becomes a little overwrought, it is always grounded by the growling chorus and a sense that all is dust if we cannot find it in our hearts to forgive.