



Molora

By Claire Allfree - Friday, April 11, 2008

The Truth & Reconciliation Commission has enabled South Africa to confront the murderous legacy of apartheid and move towards reparation.

The ancient Greek trilogy The Oresteia, in which a family is torn apart by a cycle of vengeance, isn't a perfect analogy for South African racial politics but it does provide a personal story in which to explore resonant themes of revenge and forgiveness.

The Farber Foundry's stark, bloody production transplants Aeschylus's tale to a rural Xhosa community where Electra (Jabulile Tshabalala) and her brother Orestes (Sandile Matsheni, pictured with Tshabalala) are planning to kill their mother Klytemnestra to avenge their father's murder. This is folk theatre at its most raw.

Director Yael Farber fuses a Peter Brook aesthetic with a rough and ready sense of ritual, casting the fantastic Ngqoko Cultural Group with their split-tone singing (umngqokolo) as the chorus.

Dorothy Ann Gould's superb, white Klytemnestra is a Wellington boot-wearing, boozy chain-smoker, who casually uses the wet-bag treatment to torture Electra – a direct reference to a common form of torture in apartheid South Africa.

Her battered body, semi prostrate before a murderous but faltering Orestes, serves as a symbol for apartheid South Africa itself, almost crippled by revenge, hatred and grief. Tshabalala's Electra is also almost destroyed by the ecstasy of blood-lust.

Farber frames the action with a Truth & Reconciliation testimony in which daughter faces mother. It's a potent symbol of a country that needs everyone to look within in order to heal.

Until Apr 19, Barbican, Silk Street EC2, Mon to Sat 7.45pm, £15. Tel: 0845 120 7550. www.barbican.org.uk Tube: Barbican/Moorgate