Feeling words
making them crawl
on living flesh,
drenched in blood,
chewing them, spitting them out.

This could be an interesting recipe for an elixir of love or an archaic dish. Anyway, women’s business: always with their hands in some soup. My "tragic" Medea, Penelope, Cassandra, Polyxena, Hecabe, Clytaemnnestra, are all daughters of intuition, yes, of that thing that softly yelps and calls out to us.

... Divine Mother...
scrath my iris,
throb under my feet,
breathe in my mouth
I shall fill myself up with you.

Mother, do you know me?
It is I, Medea, a priestess as well.
Do you remember the Sacred Mountain?
We were watching over the Golden Fleece,
great-grandfather’s goatskin.
... land of Colchide...
... and now... broken wings... caved in land...
... abandoned Colchide...
... the sea passed through here.

... Madre divina...
graffia la mia iride,
pulsa sotto i miei piedi,
alita nella mia bocca
mi riempirò di te.

Madre, mi riconosci?
Sono io Medea, anch’io sacerdotessa.
Ricordi il Sacro Monte?
Custodivamo il vello d’oro,
la pelle di caprone del bisnonno.
... terra di Colchide...
... e adesso... ali spezzate... terra cava...
... Colchide abbandonata...
... il mare è passato da qui.

MAY, 1990. ARADEO
I set out on this journey following in the tracks of Medea. That summer I went to Greece, Turkey and Israel... the voices in the markets, yellow clay, breathless silence... and the sea... all of this made me think of something that was in my hands, here, in the memory of my land. Starting from Euripides, I was interested in finding the place where Medea had buried her children.

I was in Calimera, in Salento, to learn the ancient funeral hymns. The old folk there still speak a language derived from Greek. I spoke with a woman, who was teaching me some songs about Medea, and she said: "Which Medea? The one who
killed her children, escaped on a ship so she wouldn't get caught by her husband? Off the shores of Santa Maria di Leuca, she threw her children's dismembered bodies into the sea; they turned into the cursed rocks near Punta Ristola... The sailors say that on stormy nights, they can see strange shadows and hear lamenting." I realised then that I had found both my "land" and the Rèputo, the funeral hymn that the women sang to lament their dead.

*Mila, mila dòdeca*
*Cidogna decatria*
*Ce mila, mila dòdeca*
*Cidogna decapenti*
*Ce mila, mila dòdeca*
*Cicogna decottà.*

Thirteen, fifteen, seventeen quinces: the viaticum offered by the mother to her son's soul as it sets off on its last journey, *es tin fsenia*, to the foreign country "behind the sun".

The inexorable arithmetic of mourning contained in this funeral lamentation evokes the archaic weaving of the myth that tightens, inextricably linking fertility and death, causing us to descend again, with a millenary leap, into the presence of the Mother's obscure power.

In the sinister measure of the Rèputo song, Medea's sorrow resounds again, the expression of life and death. And in it, I found words as impure, eviscerated, flayed, lacerated and ritualised sounds. Then, with the composer and percussionist Giovanni Tamborrino, I went on to do research on *Opera senza canto* (Opera without chant).

*Opera senza canto* is an energetic dance: the dance of the drama that reacts to sound. In human terms it is prompted by the desire to reconcile the precise manifestation of the best skills with the diversity and vitality of relationships in action; so the music and the drama, the work of the musician and that of the actor, are not added together, but fulfil each other in confrontation.¹

Stone and clay were the materials used for the sounds and the voice of Medea, a voice that interacted with sound, with normal speech over a free rhythm, rhythmic speaking independent of the musical path, rhythmic "melologue", tone-colour "melologue", that is, taking the pitch, not from the notes, but from the impure sounds present in the musical score.

The Rèputo songs presented by Medea are the logical realisation of sound, sought out in a clay reminiscent of Hellenic splendour, of a chant that is myth, syllable, story-telling, a modern flow of conscience, a tormented and inarticulate scream, and a refined synthesis between body and objects, between voice and the resounding reaction of the objects themselves.²

**JUNE, 1995. MARINA DI RAVENNA**

Argo the ship,  
Argo the ship floated at my feet,  
Jason got off pitch-skinned,  
he loosened his chest by the light of the moon,  
he loosened the braid in his hand,  
he loosened his tongue,  
he loosened his clothes.

Broken was a star at the bottom of the sea  
broken was the mirror  
broken was the head  
broken were the eardrums  
broken was the silence  
broken were the waters.

The emptiness is empty.  
Emptiness  
passes through the eye of the needle.  
Fill it  
Medea  
here you are  
unique  
crossed, found again  
Virgin and mother.  
Neither virgin, nor mother.

My womb, hard, from blows,  
blessed, was made a dwelling,  
two children to Jason you gave.

(Old Greek Italian dialect without translation)

Arte pu se chòsa kèccia-nu  
Tis su stronfi o krovattaci?  
Mu to stronfi o mauro tanato  
Ja mia nifta poddhi mali.

Now that you are under the ground

Ora che siete sotto terra
who will make your bed?  
Black Thanatos will make it  
for an endless night.

Who will smooth the pillows?  
Black Thanatos will smooth them  
with hard stones.

My children, who will wake you  
when the day breaks?  
Here in persistent sleep  
it is always the darkest of nights.

I was assistant director on To Hell, a play by Marco Martinelli, about Aristophanes. At about four in the morning, after rehearsals, I went to a bar called Ulysses on the beach, to wait for the sunrise. I noticed the name after a month, when I had already written several pages of Weave, Penelope, Weave.

Penelope weaves and waits: weaving and waiting like the plotting of destiny and a written composition. Time here in the South waits, it waits in the tiny perfect eternal gestures of my

The ink burns,  
it burns laconic vermilion roses,  
times past never to return.  
The ink burns,  
it burns pink ribbon collars,  
it burns white cotton socks,  
a hairpin.  
It burns the races up the stairs,  
the snake crawls on the whitewashed wall.  
Grandmother spins on the bench.

I intertwine words of meat  
meat, bones,  
bones, bread,  
bread  
grain.  
I intertwine words of stone  
live stone  
semi-precious stone  
holy  
stone.  
I intertwine words,  
words that burn  
words that laugh

L’inchiostro brucia,  
brucia laconiche rose vermiglie,  
acqua passata mai più tornata.  
L’inchiostro brucia,  
brucia colletti di nastro rosa,  
brucia calzini di bianco cotone,  
un ferrettino fermacapelli.  
Brucia le corse su per le scale,  
striscia la biscia sul muro di calce.  
Fila la nonna sopra la panca.

Intreccio parole di carne  
carne, ossa,  
ossa, pane,  
pane  
grano.  
Intreccio parole di pietra  
pietra viva  
pietra dura  
pietra  
santa.  
Intreccio parole,  
parole che bruciano  
parole che ridono
words that cleanse
the wounds nested in the interstices of the skin.

mother, it waits in my grandmother's half words, it waits in my great-grandmother's ifs, buts and whys.

Full stop, comma, new paragraph.
Air, thread, gauze.
Small plots, small muted lives.
One string, two strings, three knots, I jump.

The weaving becomes writing; in the same way it questions and cancels itself, and continues in the attempt to deceive or to take hold of time again.

**NOVEMBER, 1996. FROM VICENZA TO SARAJEVO**

We're excited, restless, like horses at the arrival of a storm.

Look to the east towards infinite spaces.
Look for words to say
to say you love and you are without love.
Invent a love to live.
Paper loves barely touched
loves marred by solitude
loves that warm your sleep.

The empty house
answers my footsteps:
from the kitchen to the bathroom
from the bathroom to the bed
from the bed to the sofa,
little everyday geography.
Step after step
year after year
taciturn kilometres.

Stones piled up, arranged, modelled,
whitewashed
absorb my body.
Here I am: tile upon tile
nested, entangled.
Here I am: a dripping rain-pipe
dried in the sun.

When you turn on the light
- coming in

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dried in the sun.

When you turn on the light
- coming in
and you tell yourself
- coming in
I am enough for me.
And you close the door
- coming in
to the bedroom
- coming in
dressed for bed
- coming in
looking upwards.
You grind your thoughts.
With your hand you try to grasp an absence
And you fill it by moving the pillow.

When you turn the television on
You turn the volume off
and you fall asleep
and you wake up
and turn the volume back on
and then you turn the television off.
When you undress, you wash, and dress again.
When you detect on the walls
the signs that trace the map
of a present perfect, indicative past.

But, of what time is time?

And you go into the kitchen and open the refrigerator
and you didn't do the shopping
and you take whatever there is.
And you put your feet up on the table
and then put them down and you eat
and say that you'll do the shopping tomorrow.
And you hear a noise and hold your breath.
And you write a letter,
you read it over and tear it up.
And you smoke a cigarette,
put it out and light it again.
And you play a record and don't listen to it
when...

But, of what time is time?
There are about thirty of us, actors and technicians, destination Sarajevo.
The first performance after the bombs.
The sky without depth, colourless.
No photos. The Customs.
We intersect a bus: faces of subtle pain.
Drawn at the window, almost motionless.
Mostar. Riddled with bullets, muted, dry.
The greens of cabbage,
the pitiful browns of wood,
the lava-grey of primitive sheaves.
The air hanging over the unroofed houses, dried up: obelisks of Cain and Abel.
The sun blinds the frost, it mixes the scents.
Sarajevo. So much written, so much talked about, so much fought over, so, so much silence.
Foggy streets hold our breath.
Plastic for windows, plastic for doors, plastic for the beams,
plastic covering yesterday's holes and those a hundred years old.
The wounds, still fresh in the flesh.
A suk. Tables 1m x 1m: two shoes, a jacket, three sweaters, a ball, some books.
The people sell what's left of those who have left, to those who are left.
Ubavka is pretty. Sixteen years old. Perhaps.
She smiles.
Click.
A slight tremble round the mouth.
Click.
The fountains give water again.
The wires give light again.
The sky shows its stars again.
Is it all over?
Click.
A slight tremble round the mouth.
Ubavka is pretty. Sixteen years old. Perhaps.
Perhaps like Cassandra, when she wrote to her mother Hecabe, a letter that she never sent.

MARCH, 1998. FROM BARI TO SUCRE
I journeyed alone for about a year. In my knapsack: the Iliad, Hecabe and a question. Bolivia,

Dear Mother, I see you no more,
I see you no more,
fading away on the bridge of the ship
that takes you away.
Silent on the bridge of the ship
that takes me away.
You grasp the ashes, still hot, to your breast.
I unfasten the bands, still hot, from my breast.
I am preparing for the wedding.
I have filled the amphorae with fire
to honour our god.
I have braided jasmine and lavender for the groom.
You know, mother, I would like to see you dance
as you used to,
when you made my aunts die of envy.
You must be happy and proud because
your daughter Cassandra, now a slave,
is to marry a king: the powerful Agamemnon,
the victor. Agamemnon!
But where was my God,
the one I have always honoured,
where was he when Agamemnon took me by force,
why did he not come to help me?
No mercy.

Cara madre, non ti vedo più,
dissolta sul ponte della nave
che ti porta via.
Muta sul ponte della nave
che mi porta via.
Stringi, ancora calde le ceneri sul tuo seno.
Sciolgo, ancora calde le bende dal mio seno.
Mi preparo per le nozze.
Ho riempito le scodelle di fuoco
per onorare il nostro dio.
Ho intrecciato gelsomini e lavande per lo sposo.
Sai madre, mi piacerebbe vederti danzare,
come ai vecchi tempi,
quando facevi morire di invidia le zie.
Devi essere contenta e orgogliosa perché
tua figlia Cassandra, ormai schiava,
sposa un re: il potente Agamennone,
il vincitore. Agamennone!
Ma dov’era il mio Dio,
quello che ho sempre onorato,
dov’era quando Agamennone mi prese con la forza,
perché non è venuto ad aiutarmi?
Nessuna pietà.
They stripped me of my garments and laughed  
They bound me and laughed  
They spat on me and laughed  
And it was then that the powerful Agamemnon...

...  
I shall wash all of my brothers' wounds,  
I shall wash all of our mothers' eyes,  
I shall wash the stones burnt by the fire,  
I shall wash, wash, wash...  
flesh of flesh, blood of blood that stagnates  
in the waters of the Scamander.  
Putrid pieces that float,  
swollen to the point of bursting,  
opened anuses like the mouth of a big fish.  
Greeks, Trojans... they are no longer recognisable,  
flesh of putrid flesh, blood of putrid blood.  
The Scamander is silent.

Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico: endless dusty trips by coach.  
What chant can soothe the uncovered wounds of the world?  
I wrote *Hecabe and Her Children* at La Casa del Teatro, in the Andes, and when I returned  
the ashes of the Balkans were still hot.

My writings are always born in places other than where my destination lies. They are nourished  
by what I see, what I touch, what I feel, what I remember, or don't remember. Shortages, incidents  
on the way, mistakes, chance are translated into syncopated rhythms, coloured by the  
tone and pitch of the situations that the actors or the stories create, as they enter the mouth, or  
a mute sequence that vibrates in that space that is the theatre, where bodies find emotions,  
conflicts, perspiration, thoughts.

A writing that, in order to define itself, almost always - alas! - seeks a "feminine" archetype.  
Having been born a woman, I am dominated by a cosmic spiral that, like a vulvar vice, wraps  
and tightens round every kind of material, crumbles and mixes it together, and then lets it flow...

Translated from Italian by Grace Carone

TERESA LUDOVICO (Italy) was born in 1956 in Gioia del Colle in the South of Italy. She has a university  
degree, and twenty years of experience as an artist, guided each time by different masters. She was part of the  
theatre group Koreya as an actress, and since 1992 she has worked with Teatro Kismet OperA in Bari as an  
actress, playwright and director.