

Teresa Ludovico

Memoirs of a Journey

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, Clytaemnestra, are all daughters of intuition, yes, of that thing that softly yelps and calls out to us.

... Divine Mother...
scratch 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

1. Gerardo Guccini. *L'Opera senza canto di Giovanni Tamborrino*, ed. CLUEB, Bologna. 1998, p. 1
2. Francesco Leprino. *Oltre un teatro del gesto, oltre una musica dell'in-canto. G. Tamborrino versus l'opera*, in Gerardo Guccini, op. cit., pp. 54.

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)

(Old Greek Italian dialect without translation)

(Old Greek Italian dialect without translation)

Now that you are under the ground

Argo la nave,
Argo la nave galleggiò ai miei piedi,
scese Giasone con pelle di pece,
si sciolse il petto al chiaror della luna,
si sciolse la treccia nella sua mano,
si sciolse la lingua,
si sciolsero le vesti.

Si ruppe una stella nel fondo del mare
si ruppe lo specchio
si ruppe la testa
si ruppero i timpani
si ruppe il silenzio
si ruppero le acque.

E' vuoto il vuoto.
Passa nella cruna dell'ago
il vuoto.
Riempì
Medea
eccoti
unica
incrociata, ritrovata
Vergine e madre.
Né vergine, né madre.

Mio ventre, duro, di botte,
benedetto, fatto capanna,
due figli hai dato a Giasone.

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

Tis su 'ftiazi a kafetalia
Nai na flosi trifora?
M'a litharia ta fserà.

Tis esèa tsummà, chiatera-mu
Motti i mera en atsili?
Ittu katu e' ppantan ipuno
Panta nitta skotini

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

chi vi rifarà il lettino?
Ce lo rifarà il nero Tanato
per una notte molto lunga.

Chi vi accomoderà i guanciali?
Li accomoderà il nero Tanato
con le dure pietre.

Chi vi sveglierà figli miei
quando il giorno sarà alto?
Qui sotto è sempre sonno
è sempre notte buia.

L'inchiostro brucia,
brucia laconiche rose vermicelle,
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 bicia 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.

*parole che lavano
ferite annidate negli interstizi di pelle.*

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

*Guardi a ponente verso spazi infiniti.
Cerchi parole per dire
per dire che ami e sei senza amore.
Inventi un amore per vivere.
Amori di carta appena sfiorati
amori graffiati di solitudine
amori che scaldano il sonno.*

*La casa vuota
risponde ai miei passi:
dalla cucina al bagno
dal bagno al letto
dal letto al divano,
piccola geografia quotidiana.
Passo dopo passo
anno dopo anno
chilometri taciturni.*

*Tufi impilati, inquadrati, sagomati,
intonacati
assorbono il mio corpo.
Eccomi: tegola su tegola
nidificata, impigliata.
Eccomi: grondaia grondante
prosciugata dal sole.*

*Quando accendi la luce
- entrando*

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.

e ti dici

- entrando

io basto a me.

E chiudi la porta

- entrando

nella stanza da letto

- entrando

vestita nel letto

- entrando

con lo sguardo rivolto all'insù.

You grind your thoughts.

With your hand you try to grasp an absence

And you fill it by moving the pillow.

Macini pensieri.

*Cerchi con la mano di afferrare un'assenza
e la colmi spostando il cuscino.*

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.

Quando accendi la televisione

e togli l'audio

e ti addormenti

e ti svegli

e rimetti l'audio

e poi spegni.

Quando ti spogli, ti lavi, e ti rivesti.

Quando sorprendi alle pareti

i segni che tracciano la mappa

di un passato prossimo, indicativo, remoto.

But, of what time is time?

Ma, di che tempo è il tempo?

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...

E vai in cucina e apri il frigorifero

e non hai fatto la spesa

e prendi quello che c'è.

E metti i piedi sul tavolo

e poi li togli e mangi

e ti dici che domani farai la spesa.

E senti un rumore e sospendi il fiato.

E scrivi una lettera,

la rileggi e la strappi.

E fumi una sigaretta,

la spegni e la riaccendi.

E metti un disco e non lo ascolti

quando...

But, of what time is time?

Ma, di che tempo è il tempo?



Teresa Ludovico (front) in *Ecuba e i suoi figli* (Hecabe and Her Children)
Photo: Acidi Colori

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,
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.

*Mi strapparono le vesti e risero
 Mi legarono e risero
 Mi sputarono e risero
 E fu allora che il potente Agamennone...*

...
*Laverò le ferite di tutti i miei fratelli,
 laverò gli occhi di tutte le nostre madri,
 laverò le pietre arse dal fuoco,
 laverò, laverò, laverò...
 carne di carne, sangue di sangue che stagna
 nelle acque dello Scamandro.
 Pezzi putridi che galleggiano,
 gonfi fino quasi al punto di scoppiare,
 gli ani aperti come la bocca di un grosso pesce.
 Greci, Troiani... non si riconoscono più,
 carne di carne putrida, sangue di sangue putrido.
 Muto è lo Scamandro.*

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.