

Antonio Teruzzi

“The *Baraggia* Muses”

“And this is *Baraggia*?”, asked me a young woman in a greek-style dress with a supposing smile. I looked at her interested: “Yes, this is *Baraggia*”. The young woman insisted again skeptically: “Are you really sure?”. I waited two maybe three seconds and I answered: “I come from here”. She began to look around and started going to the right, to the left, forwards and backwards as if she wanted to measure the town. This fact did not surprise me, I enjoyed very much with the woman’s attitude. “Are you a geometre?” I asked her. The young woman stared at me with a mythological glance and said: “Cannot you recognize where I come from?” I answered: “Why? Where are you from?” The young woman looked at me feeling superior: “I am Urania, Zeus and Mnemosyne’s daughter, the muse of Geometry and Astrology. You know me, don’t you?” I smiled thinking this was a candid camera. “Well, yes at school, but I did not think you really existed.” And she said: “I am here because I am looking for Antonio Teruzzi, a famous artist who wants to immortalize my nine sisters and I in a great bronze sculpture. Do you know where he is?” I answered: “Yes, I know him. He is also very famous here. Go ahead ten or fifteen metres more or less, then turn to the right and you will arrive to the end of the rainbow.” “But there is no rainbow now. It is not raining.”, she said. “You are the muse of Astrology and you should know, the stars go to sleep there when it is cold”, I answered.

Urania saw me off and on her way she shew me another greek-style dressed young woman, her sister Clio.” I am sure she would like to know something more about this place” she said. In fact, Clio met me, said hello to me and asked me about the origins of the name *Baraggia*. I was not sure, I was nervous but at the end I told something to her: “I know very little about the origins as it always happens with the names of ancient places. “Clio insisted as if she were my teacher at school. “You did not study, as always. However, you knew I was going to ask you”, she said. I tried to apologize myself as if I were at school and said: “I was passing around this place, I did not want to take part in this legend”. Then I thought about it and I remembered the old people’s comment at Triboseis’restaurant: “*Baraggia* means bushes”. Clio wanted to know more about it and she asked me: “What about the origins of this place?” I was prepared to answer to this question: “It is Longobarda. We have some news coming from the 7th century. People used to work as famers. After, the town developped near *Villa Brivio*. And from 1500 to 1800 the richest families of Milan used to come here on holidays.”

Clio insisted on who was the owner." Well, until 1866 *Baraggia* was an autonomous town. After, it became part of *Brugherio*. It belonged to the monastery of *Santa Caterina alle Chiussa* in Milan with the Chapel of *Santa Margherita*" I answered.

Clio thanked me and she added" My sister Polyhymnia , who is coming here, devotes herself to religious hymns and rites." Polyhymnia walked slowly as if she were in a procession towards *Santa Maria* street, then she stopped in front of me and asked me: "What kind of rites are practiced in *Baraggia*?" I already got used to answer to these greek metrical classical questions: "The small church belonged to *Pieve of Vimercate* and Saint Carlo Borromeo inaugurated it in 1578. Every year, we used to play also the Passion rites during the Saint Week." Polyhymnia saw me off as if she were benedicting me and she pointed to another young woman entering the town who walked sadly. Polyhymnia said to me: "It is my sister Melpomene, the tragedy muse."

Melpomene had anthracite grey rings under the eyes because she had cried a lot, a deep glance like those who look at things through rose-painted spectacles. She said: "It was a tragedy to arrive here." "There are many public transports, buses, tube, it depends on where you come from" I said. " I come from the mythological world", she answered. " Oh, it is true. I am sorry for the question" I apologized. "Anything tragical around here?", she said. " Nothing, thanks to God!", I answered. "That is the real dramma. Everything is too calm", she said again. I asked." Are you acting or are you like this?", I was very surprised. " No, my sister Taila devotes herself to theatre and acting. It is over there. She is always happy and she sings rural poems" I left Melpomene with a requiem and I smiled to Taila who asked me immediatly: "Which are your poetic traditions here in *Baraggia*?" I explained to her: "There is a long list of dialectical and theatre traditions and poets. Do you know the *Legnanesi*?" She nodded: "Yes. I know them. They are a great mix of rural traditions and comedy. I would like to learn some" "Do not move and I will bring you someone who will sing you a poem", I said. "My sister Erato sings, we do not compete between each other, every sister devotes herself to an art, we are not jealous as you mortals", she explained.

Talia went away reciting dialectical verses that she read on a paper she found behind the blinds of a window when her sister Erato arrived singing a kind of music I knew in a local dialect." Why don't you sing with me this song as it used to be sung when the grain was reaped?", she asked me. I put my hand in the pocket and said: "It is better if I do not sing. I go out of tune"

She said: "No, my sister Euterpe devotes herself to music, not me. If you want to talk to her I will call her, in that way you will be happy, although you have not been a knight with a muse."

I answered: "That is an aching key!" And she insisted: "But you insist on music or on piano to ridicule me?" I tried to apologize: "No, I am as tense as a violin

rope!" She was becoming nervous: "Stop it! I am going to call my sister Euterpe immediately so that you will play some instruments together"

Erato went away and sang her sister's name who arrived from behind the old walls and began to play the cithara. She asked me: "Do you like music?" And I answered: "Well, it is a long time I do not listen to it" She said: "Better, in this way it will remember you your youth" I justified myself saying: "But I am not so old to remember the cithara, but I enjoy a lot listening to these notes" She insisted saying: "You can ask me any piece of music you like, today I make real the past desires, maybe a love story!". I was getting irritated: "Please, *non tiriamo in ballo¹ i sentimenti!* (do not talk about feelings!)" She answered: "I do not devote myself to dances! It's my sister Tersicore's field" I said: "But it is an idiom!" She continued saying: "In our classical and lyric world the way we say things is also the way we act". Tersicore arrived jumping on the crobbled stones where generations of *Baraggia* inhabitants (*baraggini*) used to walk, she came near me and taking my right hand asked: "Why do not you dance with me? Maybe one of those country dances we used to dance in the past". I pretended to dance but I could not follow her and I said: "For me dancing has always been an epic effort". Tersicore kept on dancing and said: "My sister Calliope devotes herself to heroic poetry. She can transform a small gesture in a momentous fact with rhythm."

Tersicore turned around me three or four times and then she went away dancing slightly like dragon-flies do when they fly over the meadows in May following the rhythm of the best singing crickets of Erato.

I was leaving the town and this legend when I saw Calliope who was reciting some poems that told high deeds where I could recognize my family's daily stories. She said to me: "I know everything about *Baraggia* and its inhabitants and I will talk about them in the following centuries in my poems." I saw off Calliope and said: "It was just heroic to study you all nine at school, imagine to find you here in May in *Baraggia* where I come from", but she did not listen to me and she went towards the sculpture that would immortalize her together with her nine sisters and read in a loud voice the last heroic lyric poem that emphasized Antonio Teruzzi's life and letters, an autochthonous sculpturer and painter (a greek quotation by a contract with the muses) who goes through any geographic and mental limits and who insists on giving his bronze pieces to a plastic world. "Could not he be more heroic, could he?"

By Claudio Pollastri

¹ Translator's note: *Ballo* means dance.

