Introduction

Faber: 'The Poet Shall Once Again Be a Maker'

"Poets seem to forget that, at one time, the telling of a tale was essential,
and the telling of the tale and the uttering of verse
were not thought of as different things.
A man told a tale, he sang it."
Jorge Luis Borges (1967)[1]

"One of the big flips that's taking place in our time is the changeover from the eye to the ear,"[2] said media-theorist, Marshall McLuhan, during a public lecture at the University of South Florida in 1970. The talk was titled "Living in an Acoustic World" and in it, McLuhan discussed what he saw as a transition the West was undergoing in the 20th century from the visual to the acoustic. He pointed out that Homer's world had been an acoustic one in which the educated man memorized Homer's epics and could play them on his guitar or harp. But around 500 BCE, McLuhan argued, the phonetic alphabet began to cause the Greco-Hellenistic society to pass from a world of bards and into a world of rationalized education and literacy. The visual mode then dominated Western civilization for 2,500 years. For 2,500 years, but no longer in 1970. McLuhan claimed that young people in 1970 were still *officially* students of the visual in an educational establishment structured on literacy, but *unofficially* they were increasingly educating themselves with oral forms. This, he said, "is the meaning of rock music."[3] As a media theorist, McLuhan was less concerned with assigning value or hierarchy to an acoustic world vs.

a visual world, and more concerned with simply understanding how media affect and transform the people who use them.[4] He does, however, assign to rock music the power, as an oral form of education, to threaten the educational system as a whole, and not just. "If Homer," he said, "was wiped out by literacy, literacy can be wiped out by rock."[5] Thus, he seems to believe that it must be one way or the other, either oral or written.

This book supposes that at least one part of McLuhan's claim is true, namely, that young people for at least the past 50 years have been overwhelmingly more interested in and influenced by the lyrics of songs than they have been the lyrics of poetry. With this insight in mind, a central goal of this book is to begin to understand precisely that which singer-songwriters are saying to their audience in his highly influential lyrics and, in turn, how the messages conveyed by singer-songwriters affect their audiences. The study pivots on the Italian *cantautore* (singer-songwriter),[6] Fabrizio De André, who is put into conversation with his artistic contemporaries from Italy and abroad, to compare and contrast certain messages that are often considered revolutionary for the age. To that end, I pose general questions such as: What and whose stories are told? What values are actively upheld or critiqued? How is this music/performance, if at all, engaging history and current events? What values, conversely, may this music/performance be unwittingly promulgating? Is there a logic to the messages conveyed across a *cantautore*'s career? And, specifically, as will be explained in detail further on in this Introduction, I ask how De André and others engage ancient and modern mythologies, deliberately and unintentionally, in their songs.

Finally, all of these inquiries add up to another fundamental question, not about the artists but about the public, namely, how song-literate are we? On this point, the book complicates McLuhan's claim about the 'end of literacy.' Indeed, I think it is worth considering briefly here,

in the Introduction, 'What does literacy mean in the modern world?' and 'What might we gain from a broadening of literacy beyond the written-page?' When we talk about reading comprehension, literacy is the ability to interpret the sets of man-made symbols on the page and turn their form into communicative meaning. However, there are other modes of interpretation that imply different sorts of literacy, math literacy, for example. In fact, in reading comprehension alone, one set of symbols, whether they form a word, a sentence, or an entire composition, can work to convey many different meanings, and becoming fully literate implies learning to perceive the messages coded, not just in the text, but in the tone, in the subtext, in the historical context, and in the motivation. Likewise, in a world that has become overwhelmed with informational messages—written, verbal, pictorial—which arrive to us nearly constantly and often simultaneously with other messages, it is important to, as McLuhan might put it, *officially* educate young people in interpreting that constant stream of messages, with all of its tone, subtext, context and motivation. New-media literacy is perhaps not an altogether new kind of literacy, but it is certainly an increasingly important kind. It implies learning to not just see or hear and passively absorb television, film, news, advertising, song, fashion, etc., but, as Umberto Eco said, to interpret the complex messages sent by these media, as these, not the poetry and prose of high-brow literature, are the media that most absorb and matter to youths today.[7]

If young people are increasingly educating themselves on oral forms, it leads me, furthermore, to consider how songwriters today play a role similar to one that poets once did: that of meaningfully interpreting and elucidating human experience. Young people certainly treat the music of their given generation, popular music as it is often called, as orienting and salvific. Yet, at the same time, cultural theorists from Theodor Adorno to Roland Barthes and Michele Straniero have argued that popular music often functions simply as commodity, entertainment

for distraction, and that it should not be considered in any way transformative or educational.[8] It was, in fact, Roland Barthes' discussion of this sort of song in his 1957 *Mythologies* that inspired the thematic drive of this book. Barthes argues that in today's day and age, mass media act as the perfect vehicles for circulating modern mythology, which, as he characterizes it, is the collusion of form and content that seeks to hide ideology in its message, while embedding it in our minds, from whence it can emanate seemingly naturally as our own dreams and ideals. Barthes gives 'bourgeois song' as an example of a modern-myth vehicle, claiming it treats its consumers "as naive customers for whom it must chew up the work and over-indicate the intention."[9]

Yet, as long as there has been music of the type Barthes describes, there have been artists who have sought to go beyond simple pop-music formulas. In Italy, for example, where much of this research sets its sights, Barthes' bourgeois song is called *musica leggera* (light music) and Umberto Eco calls it *canzone di consumo* (song for consumption).[10] The scholar and musicologist, Michele Straniero, labeled this style, similarly, *musica gastronomica* (gastronomic music), because it was made to be consumed,[11] and he and a group of fellow musicians in Turin in the late 1950s formed a musical group called *Cantacronache* (which loosely translates as 'Sung Stories' or 'Sung Histories') to combat it. This group had as its central tenet the creation of popular music that was not a product of the industry of selling music but that was, rather, historically, politically, and socially motivated. They set themselves up against the music produced and disseminated in Italy by public radio and the extremely popular annual Sanremo music festival and competition, which since 1951 had defined the Italian pop music scene. As Straniero said in 1964:

> "For a singular and fatal collaboration between the music industry and the radio (to which we soon add television), the Festival, organized for the first time in 1951 […] soon

> imposed itself as a long-awaited stage for innovation, [in reality] a perfect runway from which to launch expressly prefabricated products, and a safe commercial and publicity organization in which interested industrialists are not afraid to invest a few tens of millions."[12]

Influenced by the *Cantacronache*, *la scuola genovese* (The Genoan School), a loosely associated group of musicians just southeast of Turin, in Genoa, appeared a few years later. The songs of the young musicians in *la scuola genovese* were called *canzoni d'autore* (auteur songs), and they, themselves, were called *cantautori* (singer-songwriters). Among these songwriters and musicians were those who brought the music of the *cantautori* into the spotlight:[13] Luigi Tenco, Gino Paoli, Sergio Endrigo, and Fabrizio De André, the last of whom is the artist of central concern in this book.

As stated, scholars have seen modern song as a product of capitalism and consumerism, rather than an artistic or poetic production. However, the *Cantacronache* and *la scuola genovese* musicians set themselves up against the prefabricated songs of the music industry and mainstream cultural values, and the *cantautore* genre was born from a movement that sought to create music that was meaningful, and politically and socially motivated, rather than pure entertainment. Of particular interest to me in this study is the music created by these artists, as well as those that followed their lead, during the revolutionary and countercultural years of the 1960s and 1970s, when singer-songwriters sought to disrupt mainstream pop-music traditions, and when many of the youths in their audiences sought to raze and re-sow the ideological landscape. Because of musicians' outsized space in the political and cultural landscape during those years, I ask, as my central research question, what ideas or ideologies may lie beneath the surface of these songs, which are often taken for granted as countercultural or revolutionary. This

query leads, in turn, to a consideration of the role *cantautori* played in propagating, altering, and/or revealing modern mythologies in Italy during the revolutionary years. This book asks these questions particularly in terms of the role that Fabrizio De André played in relation to other popular and mass-media producers working in Italy and abroad.

Fabrizio Cristiano De André was born on February 18, 1940, to an upper-middle class family in Genoa, Italy. He began releasing singles in the late 1950s and released his first LP in 1967, which was a transitional year in music in Italy, one that saw *cantautori,* for the first time, gaining broad national popularity and acclaim. While the *cantautori* since the *Cantacronache* had set themselves up in opposition to mainstream culture, by 1967-68, as they gained popularity, they began to have to negotiate the space between the alternative and the mainstream, the counterculture and hegemonic culture. De André, significantly, never fully partook in the music industry's star-creation machine, he abstained from appearing on television, from participating in the Sanremo festival, and he even refused to perform live for more than a decade at the beginning of his career. De André became a mainstream success by beginning as a popular cult figure, and today, decades since his death, he is considered in Italy one of the most important artists of the 20th century and is recognized internationally for such innovative albums as his 1984 *Crêuza de mä.* The Genoan *cantautore* had a long career, releasing his first single in 1958 and his final album in 1997, just two years before his death. Though some of De André's most highly acclaimed musical productions came in the 1980s and 1990s, this book focuses on the 1960s through the early 1980s[14] as those years circumscribe an important time period: from the birth of *la scuola genovese* and the burgeoning counterculture, to the end of the decade of cultural upheaval and civil terror of the 1970s in Italy.

Of all of *la scuola genovese* artists and the *cantautori* who followed them, the research undertaken here chooses Fabrizio De André as the productive lens for a number of reasons. Above all, as this book seeks to understand the meaning and potential mythologies that underly or are disrupted by mass-media musical productions and how those productions may have influenced culture more broadly, it was important to choose an artist who was both extremely intentional in his musical productions, specifically in his lyrics, and one who could be considered to be, truly, a mass-media producer. Fabrizio De André fits the bill supremely, as he created concept albums with express didactic goals that spoke about public life more than private and/emotional experiences and as he is, to this day, one of the biggest musical stars that Italy has ever produced. Additionally, as cultural mythologies are a guiding concept of the book, a comment made by De André near the beginning of his career piqued my curiosity and interest. When asked in 1968 why he had chosen the new *cantautore* genre, he responded: "Naturally many interests are influential, not least of which is the demythification of certain figures and certain cliches."[15] Indeed, as we shall see, this book is organized around four mythic figures and examines the ways in which De André and other contemporary mass-media producers wield these powerful myths in their cultural productions.

There are many definitions and descriptions of myth in the modern world, but one that is particularly useful here, due to its emphasis on the role of 'form', is Roland Barthes'. Barthes argues that myth, today, is a mode of communicating a mutable signification, not defined by the *object* of its message but by its means of communicating. Myth, according to Barthes, is part semiology and part ideology; the semiological part postulates a relationship between a signified and a signifier to create a 'sign' or "the associative total of the two terms."[16] That sign represents a system of ideas that forms a commonly accepted and understood ideology. For example, a

signifier (a rose) and the associated signified (passion) is an ideological sign that assures the gift of red roses will be taken as a sign of love and not, for example, condolences. Modern myth, Barthes claims, adds another layer, that of form, which is a lateral move that further distances the original signified from the signification and creates a unified, flat myth of signification.[17] The language of the myth is a language that does not refer back to a signified, but refers back to another linguistically constructed sign. Because of this distance, Barthes argues, myth can empty the signification: "The meaning is already complete, postulates a past, a memory, a comparative order of ideas. When it becomes form, the meaning leaves its contingency behind, empties itself, history evaporates, only the letter remains."[18] The language of myth, understood as such, does not suppress historicized meaning, but distances and distorts it, allowing cultural producers to manipulate that space between the signification and actual, historical meaning. It allows them to add their own signs, all of which are easily accepted by the latent gaze of society, as natural aspect of the complex whole. Myths, then, are essentially predetermined short-cuts or short-circuits to meaning that persistently route individuals to conclusions that appear to them inductive or natural. Barthes' modern myths are read as factual systems, whereas they are, in reality, semiological systems. These naturalized conclusions are non-historical and empty but for the rhetoric of the culture that supports them.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Barthes says that these myths are 'values' that do not guarantee truth, and which are often used as "a perpetual alibi"[19] by controlling social interests that seek to support their value system and maintain cultural and political control. Barthes offers a number of methods for what he calls a 'mythologist' to decode a myth that may be acting as a cultural alibi, so as to unmask its functionality. One method is to re-politicize mythical speech that has been depoliticized so as to appear to "purify" it.[20] Barthes suggests: "In

order to gauge the political load of an object and the mythical hollow which espouses it, one must never look at the things from the point of view of the signification, but from that of the signifier, of the thing which has been robbed."[21] His example is the image of a black soldier saluting a French flag, which acts as an alibi for French imperialism. He points out that if one looks at the image from the point of view of the soldier, one cannot help but reintroduce history and politics; one cannot help but remember the actual events of colonialism that have been distorted and purified by mythification of the image.

This method of reinserting history and re-politicizing by looking at myth from the point of view of the "thing that has been robbed," is uniquely aligned with Fabrizio De André's tendency to foreground the voiceless marginalized in songs, most of which are not personal stories but, rather, have historical settings or are inspired by current events. It is this method of mythical deconstruction, rather than Barthes' definition of mythology itself, that is most important in the research here, as this book does not set itself up as the analysis of mythologies. Rather, it sets itself up as an analysis of the treatment of myth and the degree to which mass-media producers, De André and his contemporaries, engage and deconstruct or historicize mythologies in order to destabilize or return original, historical meaning to them. With this goal in mind, the four chapters of this book are organized thematically around four myths and/or mythical figures and De André is put into conversation with contemporaries from Italy and abroad to compare and contrast the use of myths by mass-media artists who are considered to have similar ideological positions.

Chapter 1, "Civilizing the Scaffold: A History of Punishment, Control & Spectacle", considers the figure of the medieval and modern condemned man, as symbolically represented by the hanged man on the scaffold. "Civilizing the Scaffold" comes at the beginning of the book

for two reasons: firstly, as it is the only chapter dedicated exclusively to the work of Fabrizio De André, without putting his productions in conversation with other artists; secondly, because the majority of the songs with that the chapter deals come from De André's first four concept albums, released during five years near the beginning of his career. For both of these reasons, the chapter acts as a sort of introduction to De André as an artist and the themes and concerns that were central to his music from the outset. Specifically, "Civilizing the Scaffold" considers how, in De André's enduring return to the space of public execution and punishment in his oeuvre, one can ascertain a clear sense of the gallows' manifold power and a great drive towards unveiling—through hanged men and other representations of sacred power and communal sacrifice that substitute the hanged man—contemporary illusions of humaneness in spectacle and punishment. Furthermore, as the *cantautore* transitions from tales of pre-modern to modern punishment, I argue that he, even before Michel Foucault, investigates the connection between control, discipline, and behavioral normalization and uses the scaffold as a platform/symbol to scrutinize the inner working of contemporary structures of societal management and, in turn, to demythify the aggrandizing self-promotion of the West's relentless civilizing. The chapter concludes by considering modern substitutions for the gallows and scaffold, which De André proposes in his conflation of the role of the publicly executed man of the past with that of the drug-addicted and suicidal man of the present, as well as in the modern stage itself, which the *cantautore* explicitly reads as a space that has not completely shaken certain latent violent, ritualistic, and sacrificial qualities that once belonged to the space of the scaffold.

Chapter 2, "Italian Cowboy Songs: A Foreign Myth in Revolutionary Italy", examines the outsized role that the frontier-Western cowboy hero played in the cultural imagination of Italian singer-songwriters in countercultural Italy. Beginning in the 1960s, the counterculture set

itself up as alternative and oppositional to mainstream Italian values. Revolutionary ideology, furthermore, was diametrically opposed to some dominant modern ideologies that were recognized as born in and spread from the US. This foreign myth, particularly when rehistoricized, seems utterly incongruent with the Italian mythos of the counterculture years, and the chapter considers why, then, it was so pervasive in both mainstream and countercultural film, television, comics, and particularly in countercultural song. "Italian Cowboy Songs" traces a history of the myth of the frontier Wild West's representations in Italy, beginning with 18th-century lyric operas and coming into focus across the 20th century with productions like Giacomo Puccini's *Golden Girl of the West* (*La fanciulla del West*), Emilio Salgari's adventure novels, *Tex Willer* comics, various television series and ad campaigns, the Spaghetti Western (*western all'italiana*) genre, and, finally, the music of *cantautori*, which I argue was influenced by Bob Dylan's transition in the 1970s from a revolutionary/protest persona to a cowboy persona. The chapter ultimately dedicates itself to *cantautori,* as, between 1972 and 1985, three of the most influential musicians of the counterculture, Francesco De Gregori, Francesco Guccini, and Fabrizio De André—all of whom were considered to be narrators and interpreters of those tumultuous years—filtered postwar Italy, to a surprising degree, through the lens of the American foundational myth.

Chapter 3, "Countercultural Christs: Fo's & De André's Enchanted Modernity", looks at Jesus of Nazareth's unlikely return to centerstage in the 1960s and 70s. The chapter begins by juxtaposing the famous 1966 TIME magazine cover headline "IS GOD DEAD?" with a surge in cultural productions dedicated to Jesus between 1965 and 1973. The chapter considers works by Pier Paolo Pasolini, Dario Fo, De André, Andrew Lloyd Webber, and Stephen Schwartz to examine why Jesus returned as a zeitgeist figure in a moment of historic secularization and

rebellion against tradition. The chapter argues that there are significant differences between the particular countercultural moment in the US/Great Britain and Italy and thus that there were significantly different impulses for returning to the figure of Jesus. Importantly, Italy lacked a spiritual element to its cultural revolution and, furthermore, I argue that the 'death of God' and invalidation of the Christian myth in the modern world implied, in Italy specifically, the diminishing of local history itself and alienated young Italians from their own cultural heritage. The chapter reads Dario Fo's *Comical Mystery Play* (*Mistero buffo*) and De André's *The Good News* (*La buona novella*) album as attempts to excavate Italy's history as a way to rediscover and reassemble a root system that connects the present to a yet-valid communal past. Borrowing from the philosophical thought of Nietzsche (Dionysian revelation), Walter Benjamin (*rausch*), and Jane Bennett (enchantment), who have all argued for ethical generosity as more achievable through the experience of irrational joy than through intellectual reasoning, the chapter argues, ultimately, that this attempt to create an irrational, communal, emotional experience through art was, for both De André and Fo, an ethical and political impulse.

Chapter 4, "Masters vs. Lee Masters: *Spoon River* & Fiddler Jones in Translation", finally, looks at the fascinating legacy of the American poet Edgar Lee Masters in Italy and how it differs from his legacy in his own country, the US. Indeed, Edgar Lee Masters' 1915 *Spoon River Anthology* has been one of the most popular books of foreign poetry in Italy since it was first translated and published there by Fernanda Pivano and Cesare Pavese in 1943. Yet, in the US, Masters is virtually unknown to the public; American scholars find him a problematic figure and his *Spoon River* is only viable today in piecemeal form. This chapter considers the translation and reception history of *Spoon River* in Italy as well as Masters' publication and reception history in the US until his death in 1950, to bring to light the reasons for the poet's

differing legacies. As part of these differing legacies, the chapter investigates De André's 1971 concept album, *Not of Money not of Love nor of Heaven,* which was inspired by *Spoon River,* and the ways in which it renewed interest in Masters for a new generation of Italians and, at the same time, fundamentally altered the meaning of the original text. Central to the examination of *Not of Money* is a meditation on the album's arch hero, Fiddler Jones. For, while Fiddler Jones, in the English context, is a reactionary and nostalgic character, he transforms in the Italian context into a model of rebellion and anti-authoritarianism. The chapter looks at various Fiddlers Jones through the lens of nostalgia, particularly as it is theorized by Svetlana Boym, as she distinguishes nostalgic trends she calls 'restorative' and 'reflective' and seeks to delineate how the original "Fiddler Jones" epitaph and its mythical hero change across language, form, and decade. Essential to this discussion and key to Jones's own heroism, is the political position of Pivano and Pavese's original translation of the anthology, as well as the revolutionary role that music, the musical instrument, and the musician, himself, play in postwar Italian culture. In the end, the chapter argues, however, that Fiddler Jones's identification with De André after his 1971 *Spoon-River*-inspired album, make up much of the reason for which Masters has had such a lasting place in Italian culture.

Speaking about the *Not of Money* album, De André's first wife, Enrica Rignon, said in an interview in 1972, "This Jones […] is Fabrizio himself. Or, better, he is a projection of what Fabrizio sees in himself."[22] Indeed, in the book's last chapter, the ways in which the myth in question also deals with the myth of *cantautori,* and of Fabrizio De André, himself, becomes explicit. Yet, this shadow mythologizing is notably present in each of the previous chapters as well, as the singer-songwriters and other cultural producers investigated here all somehow reflect themselves and their own legacies in the mythical figures of the hanged man, the cowboy, and

Jesus of Nazareth. De André, indeed, like certain of his contemporaries has become a mythic figure in Italy and certain conceptions of him have become rote, handed down listener to listener as part of the legend of De André. He is ever called the medieval minstrel, the anarchist, the literary *cantautore* who pulled inspiration from ancient and modern verse and prose. I hope that this book will complicate these descriptions and force a partial re-conception of certain of his songs and albums, just as his own songs complicated and reconceived of the myths he was interested in. I believe, furthermore, that this study will shed new light on the historical moment, roughly the mid 1960s through early 1980s, as it parses the myths and mythical figures that were either central or anathema to mainstream and counterculture during those years.

The title of this book is borrowed from and updates the headline from an article written about De André during a time at the beginning of his career when music critics called him a *cantastorie,* or troubadour, a "Medieval' singer-songwriter",[23] and "Fabrizio: A Singer-Songwriter between the Renaissance and Crime Headlines."[24] My book title, *The Mythologist in Microgroove,* borrows, specifically, from the July 7, 1967 *Sorrisi e Canzoni TV* headline: "Fabrizio De André: The Minstrel in Microgroove."[25] De André was indeed, from the very beginning, a deeply historical storyteller, with myriad protagonists pulled from 2,000 years of occidental history, and his inclination towards interpreting and singing ancient tales is of utmost importance to his oeuvre. Yet, I have found that he was not just a 'minstrel,' or a singer of ancient heroic poetry. He was a supremely modern storyteller too, one who narrativized recent history, reinterpreted current chronicles, and deciphered the inner workings of modern myths to update and reveal them in a new light for his audience. It is for this reason that I call him a 'mythologist', which Barthes defines as one who deciphers and reveals the messages and ideologies hidden in modern mythologies.

This idea of De André as a very modern-day sort of storyteller who, nonetheless, was instantly labeled by cultural critics as 'a medieval troubadour' brings me back to McLuhan's claim from the beginning of this Introduction, that "if Homer was wiped out by literacy, literacy can be wiped out by rock." The claim disturbs me, in part, because it frames literacy as a zero-sum game, either oral or visual, never both, and flattens the potential for multiple modes of literacy in our current, complex media landscape. Its tone, furthermore, positions the return to the 'oral' as a loss, which implies that the written/visual mode, which reigns supreme in official western educational systems, is somehow inherently superior. I believe that De André, for one, would disagree with McLuhan in his seemingly hierarchical assessment of types of literacy. For, if there is an overarching theme of the four chapters of this book, it the myth of Western Civilization, which conceives of itself as better-than or more-than other societies and traditions, but which De André unpacks and complicates to reveal a dark underbelly: an unjust penal system, a long history of colonization, the alienating rationalism of modernity, and Fiddler Jones's critique of the dehumanizing Puritan worth ethic. Indeed, De André looks to other epochs, such as the Middle Ages, and other peoples, such as Native Americans, for modes of community, spirituality, and meaning-creation that may resolve issues he perceives as central to the experience of life in the West today. I believe he would have welcomed the idea that oral modes of storytelling (hallmark of many non-western traditions of knowledge transfer) were, not only returning, but gaining a foothold over visual modes (hallmark of the western tradition, especially since the Enlightenment), and he would not have been alone.

Walter Benjamin, for one, in his "The Storyteller", claims that the communicability of experience, as it is passed mouth to mouth, has fallen in value in the modern world, and has been replaced, ultimately, by information. "The art of storytelling," he claims, "is reaching its end

because the epic side of truth, wisdom, is dying out." Benjamin posits that the novel, in fact, was the first symptom of "the decline of storytelling." The novel, he claims, is different from the story or the epic because "it neither comes from oral tradition nor goes into it," and, furthermore, it is born out of and recounts the "solitary individual." The storyteller takes his own experience and makes it the experience of his listeners, communicating it to them in the fullest sense. The novelist, on the other hand, "has isolated himself."[26] Jorge Luis Borges made a similar allusion as he concluded his 1967-1968 Norton Lectures on Poetry at Harvard University:

> "Now I do not want to prophesy […] but I think that if the telling of the tale and if the singing of verse could come together again, then a very important thing might happen. […] I think that the epic will come back to us. I think that the poet shall once again be a maker. I mean, he will tell a story and he will also sing it. And we will not think of those two things as different. Even as we do not think they are different in Homer or in Virgil."[27]

Borges, like McLuhan after him, alludes to the future, and he similarly claims that we will experience a return in the literary realm to sung poetry; yet, rather than the end of an era of literacy, Borges believes that this will signal, crucially, the return of the era of the epic. "I have optimism, I have hope;" he says, "and as the future holds many things—as the future, perhaps, holds all things—I think the epic will come back to us."[28] Borges says that bringing back the epic will be the job of the singer-poet, who will sing a story to us as a new Homer. He, like Benjamin, specifically wants, not novelists, but a return of the teller, or singer, of epics:[29]

> "If we think of the novel and the epic, we are tempted to fall into thinking that the chief difference lies in the difference between verse and prose, in the difference between singing something and stating something. But there is a greater difference […] the

> important thing about the epic is the hero—a man who is patterned for all men. While […] the essence of most novels lies in the breaking down of a man."[30]

Thus, the new Homer must not tell of his love life, his youth, his struggles, he must tell of the common history of love, youths, and struggles.

Both Benjamin and Borges underline that the author of novels is not the same as an epic singer or an oral storyteller. They underline that the epic and oral tale tells of all men, while the novel tells of one man and, it seems to me, this historical, universal, non-personal, storytelling is a defining characteristic of De André's music. It is in many ways, indeed, more epic than it is novelistic (not for nothing, Borges gives as two examples of epics Westerns (the topic of Chapter 2) and the Gospels (topic of Chapter 3)).[31] It is outward looking and seated in a deep past and communal experience, rather than inward looking and seated in the present and the *cantautore*'s individual experience. So, we might say, that singer-songwriters who do what De André did, who sing purposefully and carefully of our long history and of the entire world, may very well fulfill Borges' prophesy. For, is not a singer-songwriter like this (crucially not just a poet) just what the blind Argentinian poet, himself a sort of new-Homer, was proposing?

Benjamin and Borges both liken the storyteller to a builder of sorts, Benjamin calls him a 'craftsman' and Borges a 'maker'. Benjamin claims that great medieval storytellers learned the art of storytelling at the same time they learned their crafts, as traveling journeymen on the road and in shared workspaces with master craftsmen. Storytelling, in Benjamin's view, is nothing less than "an artisan form of communication."[32] Borges' "the poet shall once again be a maker," cited above, appears consonant with Benjamin's comparison of craftsmen and storytellers,[33] yet, his meaning is distinct. Borges, in his talk, is referencing the word's etymology as it comes down to English via Latin from Greek: *poētēs*, variant of *poiētēs* 'maker, poet,' from *poiein* 'create.'[34]

Indeed, Aristotle underlines the importance of poets as creators of metaphor, which he says are not simply linguistic inventions, but which crucially assist understanding. The Enlightenment thinker, Giambattista Vico, meanwhile, challenged Descartes and claimed in his *verum/factum* principle that truth is verified through creation or invention and not through observation. According to this line of thought, poets alone amongst great thinkers are creators, while other sciences simply use that which has already been made.[35] While I call De André the 'Mythologist in Microgroove', an allusion to his renown as a modern-day minstrel, his most famous nickname amongst his fans is that of 'Faber', which is Latin for 'artisan', 'craftsman', 'maker', or 'creator'. The Latin meaning of his nickname appears to be purely coincidental and the allusion here is my own, for it is said that his childhood friend, Paolo Villaggio, called him 'Faber' after his love of Faber-Castell colored pencils. Yet, I cannot help but believe that the name has stuck, at least in part, because of its latent significance. If, indeed, modern song will bring the important return of epic tales shared communally through song, if it will bring about the return of the poet as creator, as Borges prophesizes, then it will be songs like those of Fabrizio De André. Throughout his career, De André told the stories of the marginalized, dug deep into the pressing questions of the present, dusted off forgotten histories of the distant past and, perhaps above all, encouraged his listeners time and again, to practice the two pivotal principles of his own life: individuality and compassion. His songs, for these reasons, are universal and have the qualities that will allow them, perhaps, to immortalize themselves as epic poetry has across human history.

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[1] Jorge Luis Borges, *This Craft of Verse: The Complete Norton Lectures Delivered at Harvard University* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2000), 51.

[2] Marshall McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World" in *Marshall McLuhan Speaks Special Collection* (Public Lecture, University of South Florida, 1970), http://www.marshallmcluhanspeaks.com/lecture/1970-living-in-an-acoustic-world/, 1.

[3] McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World", 3.

[4] McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World", 4, 8.

[5] McLuhan, "Living in an Acoustic World", 3.

[6] The terms *cantautore* (singular) and *cantautori* (plural) mean literally 'an author who sings.'

[7] Umberto Eco, "Per una guerriglia semiologica," in *Il costume di casa* (Milano: Bompiani, 1973), 290-298.

[8] Theodor W. Adorno, "On Popular Music," in *Essays on Music / Theodor W. Adorno*, ed. Richard D Leppert and Susan H Gillespie (Berkeley, Calif., 2002), 437-469; Roland Barthes, "The Bourgeois Art of Song," in *Mythologies* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012), 190–92; 1. M.L. Straniero et al., "La Canzone Di Consumo," in *Le canzoni della cattiva coscienza*. (Milano: Bompiani, 1964), 286–96.

[9] Barthes, *Mythologies,* 190.

[10] Umberto Eco, "La canzone di consumo," in *Apocalittici e Integrati,* 286-296, (Milano: Bompiani, 1973).

[11] Straniero, *Le canzoni della cattiva coscienza*, 5.

[12] "Per una singolare, quanto fatale collaborazione tra l'industria discografica e la radio (cui presto s'aggiunge la televisione) il Festival, organizzato per la prima volta nel 1951 […] s'impone presto come attesissima palestra delle novità, ottima pista di lancio per i prodotti appositamente prefabbricati, e sicura operazione commerciale e pubblicitaria nella quale i grossi

industriali del ramo temono non d'investire diecine di milioni." Straniero, *Le canzoni della cattiva coscienza,* 88.

[13] The events of the 1967 and 1968 Sanremo festival will be discussed in depth in Chapter 1.

[14] "La ballata del Miché," 1961, is the earliest song I deal with and the latest is from the 1981 album, *L'indiano.* There is just one song that I reference that does not fall into this time period, "Khorakhané," from De André's 1997 album *Anime salve.*

[15] "Naturalmente interferiscono moltissimi interessi, non ultimo la smitizzazione di certe figure o di certi luoghi comuni." Claudio Sassi and Walter Pistarini, eds., *De André talk: le interviste e gli articoli della stampa d'epoca* (Roma: Coniglio, 2008), 46.

[16] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 221.

[17] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 225.

[18] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 226-7.

[19] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 233.

[20] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 255.

[21] Barthes, *Mythologies*, 257.

[22] "Questo Jones […] è Fabrizio stesso. O meglio la proiezione che Fabrizio vede in se stesso" Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 135.

[23] "Il cantautore 'medioevale' Fabrizio è lo sconosciuto più conosciuto d'Italia" Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 31.

[24] "Fabrizio: un cantautore tra Rinascimento e cronaca nera" Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 16.

[25] "Fabrizio De André: Il menestrello in microsolco" Sassi and Pistarini, *De André talk,* 28.

[26] Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 87.

[27] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 53, 55.

[28] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 55.

[29] In a claim that is relevant to Chapter 2 of this book, Borges argues that there are no modern epics and so Hollywood, specifically Westerns, have caulked the hole: "In a way, people are hungering and thirsting for epic. I feel that epic is one of the things that mean need. Of all places […] it has been Hollywood that has furnished epic to the world. All over the globe, when people see a Western—beholding the mythology of a rider, a desert, and justice, and sheriff, and the shooting, and so on—- I think they get the epic feeling from it, whether they know it or not." Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 53.

[30] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 48-9.

[31] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 48.

[32] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 91.

[33] I have wondered if Borges, a voracious reader, had read this essay of Benjamin's. *Illuminations* was published in English the same year that Borges completed his Norton Lectures but the Argentinian writer, who knew German, may have read the original even before that.

[34] Borges, *This Craft of Verse,* 43.

[35] Indeed, the metaphorical, 'poets as creators,' has a rich philosophical and literary lineage that begins with Florentine Platonists of the 15th century. E.N. Tigerstedt, "The Poet as Creator: Origins of a Metaphor," *Comparative Literature Studies* 5, no. 4 (1968): 455–88.