"Fiddler Jones, Between Nostalgia and Revolution"

In Luigi Ballerini's 2016 centennial translation of Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology,* the "Fiddler Jones" epitaph is translated as "Jones il violinista" and the line "And if the people find you can fiddle, / Why, fiddle you must, for all your life" (ll. 3-4)[1] becomes "Se la gente / sa che sei bravo col violino, non hai scampo: / suonerai il violino per il resto dei tuoi giorni" (Masters, 2016a, ll. 2-4). Ballerini's is technically more precise than Fernanda Pivano's original 1943 translation, which had, of course, been titled "Il suonatore Jones", and those lines translated as "E se la gente sa che sai suonare, / suonare ti tocca per tutta la vita" (Masters, 2014, ll. 3-4)[2]. However, while Pivano's version is less exact—from a 'fiddler' Jones transitions to the broad category of 'musician' in both the title and line in question—Ballerini's translation somehow reads as discordant and as not only not-more-exact, but even as wrong. This is due, in part, to the long history and renown of the Pivano translation in Italy, but is arguably more expressly due to Fabrizio De André's 1971 musical rendition, which leans on Pivano's translation in both the title and lyrics.

In his song, De André takes many liberties, but the lines in question come across nearly verbatim: "E poi se la gente sa / E la gente lo sa che sai suonare / Suonare ti tocca / Per tutta la vita" ("Il suonatore Jones" ll. 19-22). The aural dissonance of Ballerini's translation is perhaps most apparent in Masters' introductory epitaph "The Hill," in which the line asking of the whereabouts of Fiddler Jones—he who was "thinking neither of wife nor kin, / Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven" (ll. 32-33)—is translated by Ballerini as "senza mai pensare né a farsi / una famiglia, né ai soldi, né all'amore, né al paradiso" (Masters, 2016a, p. 5, ll. 32-33). Here the translation

[1] All citations of Masters' original epitaphs are taken from the 2014 Einaudi edition, they will be listed with line numbers but without page numbers as it is a Kindle edition.

[2] All citations of Pivano's translations is listed with line numbers but without page numbers as in the Kindle edition.

seems, in its insistent choice of synonyms that differ from Pivano's, to desire expressly to subvert expectations.[3] Pivano's own translation is "non pensando né a moglie né a parenti, / né al denaro, né all'amore, né al cielo" (Masters, 2014, ll. 32-33), and it, again, acts as the lexical basis for De André's version of "The Hill" ("La collina") as well as the metonymic title for the entire concept album, *Non al denaro non all'amore né al cielo*. The sense that Ballerini's translation is somehow incorrect has much to do with readers' expectations of recognition and a sentimental longing that goes unfulfilled in the new translation as it disrupts the nostalgic affective power of the lines.

It is precisely the nature of nostalgia in *Spoon River,* and "Fiddler Jones" specifically, that this article is concerned with, as I argue that it goes a long way towards explaining the differing legacies of Masters and his work between Italy and the US.[4] As Masters scholar John Hallwas states, *Spoon River* has "slowly faded from the canon of significant American literature" (1), while in Italy it is considered one of the most significant works of foreign poetry. Through the lens of nostalgia, particularly as it is considered by Svetlana Boym in her 2001 *The Future of Nostalgia,* as she distinguishes nostalgic trends she calls 'restorative' and 'reflective', the article seeks to understand how the poem and its hero change across language, form, and decade. It will investigate various Fiddlers Jones, but will focus on the original 1915 Masters epitaph, "Fiddler Jones," Pivano's 1943 translation, "Il suonatore Jones" and Fabrizio De André's 1971 song of the same name.[5] As we will see, Jones is an ideal character through which to investigate the larger change in tone in *Spoon River*, as he has arisen from the Italian translation as the anthology's central hero

[3] The lexical substitutions of 'soldi' and 'paradiso' for 'denaro' and 'cielo' respectively, do not seem objectively more precise as translations of 'gold' and 'heaven'. The substitution of 'farsi una famiglia' for 'moglie' and 'parenti', as a translation of 'wife' and 'kin' is arguably less precise, as 'kin' is a term, used particularly often in the south, to refer to one's familial relationships, not specifically to one's children.

[4] For more on this see VanWagenen, 2019.

[5] For the sake of brevity, I refer here to the album's author singularly. However, it should be noted that De André worked with Giuseppe Bentivoglio on the lyrics and with Nicola Piovani on the musical arrangement.

and representative character. Finally, essential to this discussion and key to Jones's own heroism, is the revolutionary role that music, the musical instrument, and the musician, himself, plays in postwar Italian culture.

Confronting Nostalgia across Fiddlers Jones

Masters' original *Spoon River Anthology* is considered by interested US scholars today to be a lament for the loss of a mythical, national utopian past in the wake of the Civil War, industrialization, and increased immigration to growing urban centers like Chicago. As a Southern, agrarian-traditionalist Democrat (on the wrong side of history) in post-Civil War America, Masters certainly had reason to subscribe to the sort of nostalgic memorializing that Boym cites in her introduction to *The Future of Nostalgia* via the cultural historian, Michael Kammen, who says that nostalgia is "essentially history without guilt. Heritage is something that suffuses us with pride rather than with shame. […] Nostalgia in this sense is an abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming" (epub). *Spoon River* is just this, 'history without guilt', and for this it was, perhaps, particularly inviting to the Italian readership near the end of WWII. Like Masters, many Italians sought a guilt-free homecoming after the *ventennio fascista*, and I argue that *Antologia di Spoon River* proffered a foreign, but somehow familiar, mythology of a utopian past, in which Italian readers could situate memory somewhere safe, not in defense of the past, but, rather, free from recent historical trauma.[6]

This foreign, geographically-estranged nostalgia may appear paradoxical, but it is in fact predictable within Boym's discussion of the sentiment, as she argues that "at first glance, nostalgia is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time—the time of our childhood" and that a danger of all types of nostalgia is "confusing the actual home with an imaginary one"

[6] For a more detailed discussion of this relationship, see (VanWagenen 2019).

(epub). Aspects of the affect, do change, however, between the local and the foreign contexts and the rest of this essay will deal with precisely those changes: why they exist and just how they alter the emotional drive of the poetry. To begin with, one must account for the difference in the experience of nostalgia when it is 'remembered' as compared to 'imagined'. While Boym claims that all nostalgia risks confusing the imagined home for the real one, there is an essential difference between Masters' poem in the American context—where *Spoon River* is read as "an attempt to recover what had vanished—from [Masters'] life and from American culture—by memorializing it in his poetry" (Hallwas 7)—and in the Italian context, where the 'memories' become necessarily personal rather than communal, individual rather than national, as they are imagined rather than experienced. This opens the way for the vision of utopia to present, immediately, as less reactionary, less retrospective, and more open to the idea of improvement through change in the future rather than improvement through regression into a traditional past.

This distinction between national/individual and lost-past/potential-future prefigures a distinction Svetlana Boym makes in her discussion of nostalgia, as she discusses two tendencies she calls 'restorative' and 'reflective':

> Restorative nostalgia stresses *nostos* and attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home. Reflective nostalgia thrives in *algia*, the longing itself, and delays the homecoming - wistfully, ironically, desperately. Restorative nostalgia does not think of itself as nostalgia, but rather as truth and tradition. Reflective nostalgia dwells on the ambivalences of human longing and belonging and does not shy away from the contradictions of modernity. Restorative nostalgia protects the absolute truth, while reflective nostalgia calls it into doubt. (epub)

That is to say, at least in part, restorative nostalgia reads as conservative and reactionary, while reflective nostalgia reminisces, yes, but remains critical of the past and open to the future: "Reflection suggests new flexibility, not the reestablishment of stasis" (epub). In this discussion of closed v. open nostalgic modes, lies an aspect of nostalgia that is of particular importance in

Spoon River. That is, the promise of the future lies in *inclusion* for reflective nostalgics, while for restorative nostalgics, as Boym states, the "imagined community [is] based on exclusion more than affection, a union of those who are not with us, but against us" (epub). This restorative framework for memorializing through exclusion is key to Masters' anthology, as he structures the entire work around an Us v. Them narrative that pits heroic southern frontiersmen against antagonistic, moralizing New Englanders. The heroes of Masters' narrative, like "John Wasson", "Rebecca Wasson", "Aaron Hatfield", "Lucinda Matlock," and "Fiddler Jones", himself, are all old-timers who were pioneers on the land and who reflect a traditional, antebellum way of life. They are, significantly, not absolute heroes, but rather their valor is presented as a condemnation of those who are different from them, and not only different, but in their difference, morally inferior.

Fiddler Jones is introduced by Masters in the introductory "The Hill" as a representative hero of the old ways, the ways of the 'Aunts' and 'Uncles' (l. 20). While Jones may read to the modern eye as rebellious or subversive, the characteristics overtly depict, not a new wave, but the old traditional 'Us' in Masters' mythology, whom Hallwas describes as Virginian pioneers who advocated individual rights, who loved to fight, hunt, and drink, and who prized kinship:

> Where is Old Fiddler Jones
> Who played with life all his ninety years,
> Braving the sleet with bared breast,
> Drinking, rioting, thinking neither of wife nor kin,
> Nor gold, nor love, nor heaven?
> Lo! he babbles of the fish-frys of long ago,
> Of the horse-races of long ago at Clary's Grove,
> Of what Abe Lincoln[7] said
> One time at Springfield. (ll. 29-37)

Jones and his clan were agrarian traditionalists and their way of life was effectively challenged

[7] It is worth noting that Masters was a vehement opponent of Lincoln and his reference to him is in line with the tendency in his biography of Lincoln to talk about him anecdotally, via local lore, rather than objectively, via the historical record.

(beginning with the Civil War) by the New Englanders who, after the war, increasingly populated Midwestern towns and dominated the political landscape. This group, who is framed by Masters as the antagonistic 'Them', were called Yankees and were seen as modernizers and reformers, they prized education, opposed drinking and slavery, and were willing to put limits on individual freedoms for the benefit of society (Hallwas 3-4). These specific historical details, which underlie the entire community landscape portrayed in *Spoon River,* are largely the reason for the work's relative obscurity in the US. For Masters' nostalgic tone is founded in a desire for a return of a society structured on slave-labor and Northern-European racial stock and culture. Masters, himself, dangerously considered that era, not as something individually longed for, but as a "forgotten truth" (Boym epub), something morally and universally superior, and the hero Fiddler Jones plays a key role in the memorializing of this 'truth', as he becomes a personification of communal memory.

Jones is introduced as one who was known to "babble" about memories from "long ago" ("The Hill" ll. 34, 35) and his tendency to reminisce continues in his own epitaph, as the wind reminds him of the "rustle of skirts" at dances ("Fiddler Jones" l. 9) and the "whirling leaves" of a friend dancing to "Toor-a-Loor" (ll. 12-14). In his reminiscing about fish frys ("The Hill" l. 34), community dances and picnics (ll. 10, 14, 22) and the pristine Illinois landscape (between rural, agricultural, and wild), Fiddler Jones acts as a personification of local memory itself. As Hallwas points out, "Masters regarded Jones and other old-time fiddlers—who were also dance-callers and tale-tellers—as bardic figures who expressed and interpreted American culture. That is why the fiddler Blind Jack is portrayed in the *Anthology* as seated at the feet of Homer. He is a kind of American Homer" (54). This memory, however, this communal tale and American myth, which Fiddler Jones carried for his ninety years, is inaccessible to us now—as predicted by Boym's

theory of modern nostalgia[8] —, as his final lines allude to a definitive rupture between his time and ours: "I ended up with a broken fiddle— / And a broken laugh, and a thousand memories" ("Fiddler Jones" ll. 35-6). The instrument through which he communicates (both his fiddle and his voice) is broken, and thus too the line of communication between himself and his listeners/readers.

The breaking of Jones' instrument becomes less tragic in Fernanda Pivano's translation, due in large part to the distance between the communal memory of the original readership in 1915 and the readership in Italy in 1943 and afterwards, which alters the hue of the nostalgia evoked in Jones' memories. Indeed, the very significance of the instrument, itself, changes for Italian readers, as is apparent in Pivano's decision to render the hero as 'Suonatore Jones', or 'Musician Jones', rather than 'Fiddler Jones'.[9] This choice has probably to do with the insight, likely Pavese's,[10] that 'fiddle' translates into Italian necessarily as 'violino', but 'violino' is reminiscent in Italy of a classical tradition that has had its roots in Cremona since the 16th century and that has since been associated to a great degree around the world with the cultural elite.[11] The fiddle, on the other hand, is associated with Irish and English folk music and with American roots music in Folk, Bluegrass, Blues, Country-Western, Cajun, and Appalachian traditions. Thus, to translate Jones as a simple 'musician' allows him to more readily represent the countryside and common folk (music as well as people). Only at the end of the poem, and in terms that remind the reader of Jones's status as

[8] "Modern nostalgia is a mourning for the impossibility of mythical return, for the loss of an enchanted world" (epub).

[9] Scholar of American literature, Daniela Fargione talks about this, arguing that the necessary use of 'violino' as a translation of 'fiddle' is "trascendendo del tutto le differenze sonore, culturali, persino di casta che l'uno dei due lemmi implica" (Michelone 70).

[10] In his first article published on *Spoon River* in Italy, Pavese discusses the epitaph and refers to it as "Il suonatore Jones. "L'*Antologia di Spoon River*" in *La Cultura*, November 1931.

[11] That is not to say that the 'violino' is not used to play Italian folk music in traditions across the peninsula. However, it does not, as the fiddle does, immediately distinguish between the classical and folk traditions, and the broader translation would allow Italian readers to imagine Jones playing any number of local instruments, the *zampogna*, *ciaramedda* or *mandolino*, before fixing the instrument as a 'violino' in the third to last line of the poem.

non-elite, does Pivano risk mentioning the instrument specifically, "Finii con un violino spaccato - / un ridere rauco" (Masters, 2014, ll. 24-25), a moment which also serves, in the translation of the second 'broken' as 'rauco' (hoarse), to mend slightly the rupture in communication between Jones and his listeners.

The inability to translate the full cultural weight of the term 'fiddler' into the Italian context[12] is an illustrative example of the sorts of changes in tone *Spoon River* underwent in translation. In fact, Howard Wight Marshall introduces the term 'fiddle' in his exploration of traditional fiddle music, *Play Me Something Quick and Devilish: Old-Time Fiddlers in Missouri*,[13] by underlining the difference between the definitions given to 'fiddle' and 'violin' in Noah Webster's 1806 first American dictionary of English. To 'fiddle' as a verb is "to play on a fiddle, trifle, do little, idle" and a 'fiddler' is "one who plays upon a fiddle, a trifler," while the 'violin' is stated to be "a sweet musical instrument, a fiddle." Marshall points out that the different definitions for the same instrument show "the paradoxes and emotions borne by fiddlers and fiddle music" (1). He goes on to say that much of the weight of the term has to do with the role the instrument has played across the history of the United States, stating that it "has been a principal musical instrument in American community life since the beginning, to be challenged in popularity only by the piano in the late nineteenth century and in the mid-twentieth century by the guitar" (1). The role, he suggests, has something to do, in turn, with its physical weight, which allowed it to be carried easily by early immigrants and pioneers.

Marshall's discussion of the central place of the fiddle in American cultural heritage

[12] This especially in 1943 when information was not so readily available for simple technological reasons as well as the specific effects of Fascist isolations and disruptions in international contact due to WWII.

[13] *Spoon River* is set in Illinois not Missouri, however, the two states border each other and experienced the frontier quite similarly. Sangamon County, which is the inspiration for much of Masters' work, is just about 100 miles from the Missouri border.

underlines just how squarely Masters' Fiddler Jones was placed within the constructs of this heritage. Marshall writes: "Whether it is played at a fish fry, in a classroom, or for a new generation of square dancers, the violin[14] has been part and parcel of our lives for hundreds of years" (9). This mention of the fish fry and square dance (Marshall discusses horse races as well in "Horse Races and Fiddle Tunes" (68)) are just the places Jones was constantly asked to play. Yet, they are also the terms that translate problematically, due to their extra-lexical, cultural meaning. Indeed, Pivano translates 'fish frys' as "fritture" while other translators attempt with "pesce fritto" (Ballerini 5; Ciotti Miller 21; Porta 55; Terrinoni Kindle loc. 260). Alessandro Quattrone's 2006 translation gets closer with "mangiate di pesce fritto" (33) as he locates the importance of the term in an event rather than a food, and Alberto Rossatti's 1986 translation comes nearest, as he emphasizes the festive nature of a fish fry with "sagre di pesce fritto" (Kindle loc. 577). 'Sagre' is not a perfect translation, as fish frys were not stable, annual events specific to a certain town at a certain time, but it gets at the local, annual, festive nature of the fish fry in American culture, particularly until the later 20th century. The idea of the 'dance' as a generic 'ballo' in Italian translations likewise signifies differently in readers' imaginations. In the old Midwest, or the Kentucky tradition Fiddler Jones comes out of,[15] a 'dance' was quite specifically an outdoor or barn event, sometimes called a 'square-dance' or 'hoedown' or simply a 'picnic', and the dancing, itself, was variously folk-styled, from immigrant and pioneer traditions.

These community events, which are personified and remembered in the person of Fiddler

[14] Marshall's book uses the term 'violin' to denote the instrument so that the verb 'fiddle' can more clearly indicate the playing of the instrument "in a vernacular musical performance" (1). However, his use of the term 'violin' to denote the instrument is nearly always in the context of "fiddling" rather than the more general "playing."

[15] In 1921, Josephine Craven Chandler identified Fiddler Jones as John Armstrong, called 'Fid' or 'Fiddler.' She states that in his family and others prominent settler families the "boys were typical sons of the frontier; fond of drinking, hard riding, horseracing, dancing, fiddling and all rude sports." She goes on to say that his family came from Kentucky" (265).

Jones, play into Masters' Us v. Them narrative for his immediate readership, as raucous fiddling and dancing would have been associated with traditional Virginia and Kentucky families,[16] while progressive newcomers from New England may well have, as Howard Wight Marshall points out, seen the fiddle as "Satan's tool," declaring that "the rhythms and emotions of social dancing and fiddling lead people to break taboos and sample forbidden fruit" (2). It also would have been redolent, as it still is for American readers today, of a tradition that was already beginning to be lost in 1915 and which continued to disappear in subsequent decades. In this sense, the heroism of Fiddler Jones is evocative of Boym's claim of restorative nostalgia that "attempts a transhistorical reconstruction of the lost home" (epub). *Spoon River* is indeed Masters' attempt to bring about a return of a mythical pre-modern past, and as Hallwas points out, "the myth of America as New World Eden" is evident in the *Anthology* (48). In fact, the contemporary mood in the industrializing and modernizing Midwest was in line with Boym's larger argument for tendencies in modern nostalgia, which she says "has a utopian dimension, only it is no longer directed at the future" (epub). As Hallwas writes: "As time passed and America changed, that vision of a pastoral utopia shifted its location from the future to the past" (48), and in this modern moment, many modernist writers struggled to conceive of the future and relinquish the past, yet "no American writer was so troubled by those changes" as Masters was (42) and none, like him, focused on its return rather than its loss (69). The recalcitrance and opposition to change that Jones' fiddling evoked for American readers in 1915, however, falls easily away in Italy in the postwar, and particularly in the 1960s and 70s, when music and dancing became symbolic of youth, rebellion, progress and the desire for change.

[16] Marshall says of the people who brought fiddlers to Missouri (as they had to Illinois): they were "British American settlers from Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, and the Carolinas" (2).

A Changing Jones for a Changing Generation

Indeed, in the Italian context, much of what sets *Spoon River* up as a locus for restorative nostalgia evaporates—the problematic political implications of Masters' idyllic landscape, the bitter Us v. Them / Old v. New narrative, the nationalistic memorializing. Thus, the translated work opens up to a different sort of nostalgia, which is at once necessarily more personal, as *Spoon River* doesn't evoke a shared communal past for its Italian readership, and at the same time is less strictly backwards looking, as its presentation of the past is imagined, thus it can be read more easily within the context of potentiality, as something new or future. I argue that this change allows the work to present as less restorative and more reflective in its nostalgic tone and that it helps to explain how *Spoon River* came to be read as revolutionary in Italy, rather than reactionary, as it reads in the US context. Regarding Fiddler Jones' revolutionary status, specifically, the controversy around music and dance that Howard Wight Marshall references, returns in a highly relevant key in the second postwar period. As early as the 1950s, with the rise of Elvis Presley in the US, and especially in the 1960s and early 1970s, precisely when De André releases his *Spoon River* album, music was regarded by youth generations across the West as potentially revolutionary and musicians, themselves, were often seen as implicitly subversive personages. At the same time, even before the musical revolution began, *Spoon River* had already become synonymous with political subversion in Italy, and thus it was well-positioned in 1971 to transition into an artistic work that was not just regarded as culturally subversive (subverting normativity), but as *impegnato,* that is, as politically engaged, and thus as even more critically revolutionary.

The revolutionary character of *Antologia di Spoon River* in Italy has much to do, in fact, with the myth around its original publication, which Pivano claimed was accomplished by Cesare

Pavese sneaking it past censors with the title *Antologia di S. River*.[17] It has to do, as well, with its association with Pavese, himself, one of the great anti-fascist writers, and with Fernanda Pivano, who later became a leading translator of the Lost and Beat generations in Italy. This origin story has created a subversive aura around Masters and *Spoon River* that in 1971 was transferred to Fiddler Jones, as he became the most well-known character and greatest hero of the work. Jones' arch-heroism, in fact, arises quite naturally in the wake of De André's album, as musicians in Italy since at least 1957 (when the Turinese *Cantacronache* established an alternative music scene) had become the voices of youth culture and revolutionary attitudes. Ten years before *Cantacronache* came onto the scene, however, there were already signs of the role the musician would play in revolutionary culture and an early intimation came, interestingly, from none other than Pavese.

Cesare Pavese's 1947 novel, *Il compagno,* tells the story of a young man in Fascist Turin who leaves his home and his family's tobacco shop to move to Rome where he becomes politically active and ends up imprisoned for his engagement. The novel is tagged on the cover of the 1990 Einaudi edition as "Il romanzo più politicamente impegnato di Pavese" and begins with the line, "Mi dicevano Pablo perché suonavo la chitarra" (epub)[18], continuing:

> La notte che Amelio si ruppe la schiena sulla strada di Avigliana, ero andato con tre o quattro a una merenda in collina–mica lontano, si vedeva il ponte–e avevamo bevuto e scherzato sotto la luna di settembre, finché per via del fresco ci toccò cantare al chiuso. Allora le ragazze si erano messe a ballare. Io suonavo – Pablo qui, Pablo là – ma non ero contento, mi è sempre piaciuto suonare con qualcuno che capisca, invece quelli non volevano che gridare più forte.

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[17] From the most recent edition of Einaudi's *Antologia di Spoon River*: "Convinse Einaudi a pubblicarlo: giorni felici, ma già tormentati dall'inizio della guerra. Per ottenere l'autorizzazione dalle censure del tempo venne richiesto il permesso di pubblicazione per una Antologia di S. River, e all'antologia di questo nuovo Santo il permesso venne accordato (o almeno così mi raccontò Pavese; come capire se parlava sul serio?) E il libro uscì, in piena guerra, poco prima che la casa editrice venisse confiscata" (Bonino, 2014, Kindle loc. 209; Pivano, 2014, Kindle loc. 363).

[18] This is likely a reference to Pablo Picasso and his "The Old Guitarist", but it is also reminiscent of the struggle against Franco in Spain, which saw the height of its guerrilla action with Spanish Maquis between 1945 and 1947. Similarly, Visconti's *Lo spagnolo* character from 1943's *Ossessione* is understood, implicitly, as subversive, since Spain was an isolationist nation during much of the 1940s and any Spaniard abroad would have been there either in exile, refuge, or partisanship. Pavese continued in the opening lines of his novel.

This beginning is highly evocative of Jones; he too begins his tale on "una collina" where he was called away to "una merenda" ("Il suonatore Jones" l. 22), he remembers "le ragazze" che "ballano" (l. 10), he lived a life in which he was known for "bevendo, facendo chiasso" ("La collina" l. 32), and Pablo gives the sense throughout the novel, as in this citation with his "Pablo qui, pablo là," that "se la gente sa che sai suonare, / suonare ti tocca, per tutta la vita" ("Il suonatore Jones" l. 3-4). However, the stakes of music for Pablo are already posited as greater than a mere diversion for dancing, and this will increasingly be the case for music in Italy, too. Pablo enjoys playing for those who understand the music, not for mere amusement. He muses near the beginning of the novel: "Vale la pena la chitarra per divertire quattro stupidi che si fanno trovare la sera nei prati? Fanno baccano, fanno i matti, cosa c'entra la chitarra?" (Kindle loc. 86). At play in the work is the tension between a meaningful and meaningless life and what it means to make 'significant' choices. It seems the guitar, which is at center stage throughout the first half of the novel, has the potential to create meaning and to instigate change, but it is used inevitably to amuse and distract. It is stuck in a strict relationship—"chitarra e canzonette" (Kindle loc. 1153)—in Turin, and both the city and instrument must be left behind, traded for Rome and political literature, in order to truly live meaningfully.

Pavese appears, consciously or not, to found central aspects of Pablo on the *Il suonatore* Jones character, which he had recently been translating and had been thinking about and writing about in scholarly essays since 1931.[19] In Pablo, in his relationship to music and song as well as his proto-revolutionary status, we get an early intuition of the taxonomy of youth heroes who will surface in the following twenty years, and often, like Pablo, the two (political revolutionaries and

[19] "L'*Antologia di Spoon River*" in *La Cultura*, November 1931, discusses "Fiddler Jones."

musicians) will merge in historical and fictional characters.[20] Fabrizio De André will make the relationship between Jones and modern musical revolution much more straightforward and he will complete the transition from 'Jones' the last exemplar of the old, lost ways, to 'Jones' the harbinger of change. De André will also disrupt the contemporary image of the musician-as-liberated/liberator when he creates a sort of sequel to "Il suonatore Jones" in his autobiographical song "Amico fragile", which marks a break in De André's own life between the old and new.

Fabrizio De André: "*Il suonatore* Jones del Sessantotto"

The change in tone (away from nostalgia) and perspective (away from the past) that had begun with Pivano's translation of *Spoon River* is completed in De André's 1971 concept album. In nine songs (eight epitaphs and the introductory "La collina"), De André re-proposes Masters' original tale for a new generation. While Masters acts as inspiration for the work, De André's loose interpretations, as well as the very fact that only nine of the original 244 poems are included, suggests from the outset a divergence in tone and meaning between Masters' and De André's creations. In fact, since Masters' epitaphs are largely inter-referential, the Us. v. Them rivalry, much of which is created in the anthology through webs of connecting tales, simply disappears in De André's album. Fiddler Jones, for example, speaks of his neighbor (at least in terms of the order of epitaphs) when he says "To Cooney Potter a pillar of dust / Or whirling leaves meant ruinous drouth; / They looked to me like Red-Head Sammy / Stepping it off, to Toor-a-Loor" ("Fiddler Jones" ll. 11-14). In absolute terms, Jones seems to make an innocent remark about priorities; Potter is a diligent farmer while Jones is too distracted by music to farm successfully.

[20] Luigi Tenco's 1967 suicide at San Remo sets the tone for this revolutionary-musician hero, and later artists struggle to defend themselves when they are accused of producing non-revolutionary songs or partaking in the music industry too heavily (see for example Marco Santoro's treatment of the ideological trial of Francesco De Gregori at Milan's Palalido on April 2, 1976). In fiction, there is, for one, the notable example of Sergio Leone's hero, Harmonica, from 1968's *C'era una volta il West*.

Jones asks: “How could I till my forty acres / Not to speak of getting more?” (ll. 15-16). Potter, we presume, tills successfully, and indeed we find out as much in the opening lines of “Cooney Potter”: “I inherited forty acres from my Father / And, by working my wife, my two sons and two daughters / From dawn to dusk, I acquired / A thousand acres” (ll. 1-4). We also learn, however, that Potter was not content from this gain and continued to drive himself and his family to the grave through hard work and avarice.

When we read “Fiddler Jones” we may understand in absolute terms that Jones prefers music to farming, and Potter prefers farming to music. However, when we read the two epitaphs together, it is clear that Jones represents the side of community sharing, while Potter represents individualistic greed, as he thinks only of profits and acreage, and he isn’t afraid to deny himself and his family joy to gain it. De André’s “Il suonatore Jones” does not mention Potter, nor does Potter have his own song. Thus, by virtue of his speech’s absolute rather than relative position vis-à-vis other speakers, De André’s Jones takes on a much more open and positive tone. His is no longer a denunciation of others’ lives, but rather, a simple proclamation of his own way of living. This alone changes the tone of his song, relieving it of the original’s hints of recrimination.

De André, furthermore, changes much of the text of the original poem to express his own sense of that which is freeing in Jones’s life-affirming verses. Most crucial, perhaps, is his change of instrument, for the original Fiddler Jones—who for Pivano had become Musician Jones, a violinist—becomes a flautist in De André’s song. The *cantautore* claimed in an interview with Pivano, which was published on the inside cover of the original album release, that he changed the instrument “per ragioni di metriche” (Sassi 123). Yet, scholars have found this explanation not

entirely convincing,[21] as the line in question, "Finii con un flauto spezzato" (De André l. 25), could have been rendered alternatively as "Finii con un violino spezzato", with just some elision of the central syllables. De André would have sacrificed an internal rhyme between the held first syllable of 'flauto' and the 'rauco' that follows in the next line, but the formal elements alone do not seem urgent enough, in and of themselves, to warrant a change of this central element of Jones's story. Rather, I find there to be additional implications to De André's alternative choice of instrument. Namely, the change erases the ambiguity of the fiddle/violin, which perhaps had caused Pavese and Pivano to change the title of the poem in the first place, and it replaces the mythical instrument, specifically symbolic of the birth and early years of the United States, with the mythical instrument of Pan, a more universal myth in the West. The replacement of the fiddle with the flute allows Jones, in fact, to symbolize nature, and the eternal return of Spring, as Pan in Greek mythology is associated with the season. It furthermore allows an opening up of the idyllic landscape of Illinois as it is presented by Masters, to situate Jones in Pan's homeland, Arcadia, which came down to the West (and Italy perhaps particularly, through Renaissance art) as a pastoral utopia, untouched by progress and modernity. Through this small change, the significance of Jones's status as an important repository of local community memory is universalized to make his memory both abstracted, almost timeless, and expanded to include not only the local American experience, but any potential personal experience of the West.

The replacement of the fiddle with the flute also allows for the mending of communication that remains broken at the end of Masters' poem. Masters' Jones's strings are broken, and his listeners can no longer hear his tales, only readers remain. On the other hand, De André's Jones's

[21] Media scholar Ugo Ceria, aware of De André's claim about meter, argues rather that the change was a nod to the George Brassens' song "Le petit jouer de flûteau" (Michelone 48).

flute is broken while the musician's strings are still playing, and the tale can still be told to the listening public, through De André himself, and his guitar.[22] Indeed, the central message of the album has to do with communication, those who can and those who cannot make themselves heard in the modern world, as De André says explicitly in his interview with Pivano (Sassi 121-122). Ultimately, De André's Jones's song is not a lament for something lost, rather, it is an affirmation of the continued power of music to gather people to listen. In the album's first song, "Un matto", the speaker is searching for a means of communication: "Tu prova ad avere un mondo nel cuore / E non riesci ad esprimerlo con le parole […] anche tu andresti a cercare / Le parole sicure per farti ascoltare" (ll. 1-2, 7). While in Jones's song, the last on the album, that 'farti ascoltare' becomes 'lasciarti ascoltare' when Jones describes why he plays: "ti piace lasciarti ascoltare" (l. 23). Thus De André's Jones suggests that in the modern world musicians exist in a unique position; they do not have to fight to be heard, listened to, understood, but rather they have the pleasure of people seeking them out to listen. That is to say, musicians act as a space of communication for a modern community that struggles to find it.

Fabrizio De André's *suonatore* is neutralized, as he is removed from his polemical position in *Spoon River,* he is universalized through his change in instrument, and his role as musician in 1971 makes him implicitly revolutionary, in line with the mood of the youth generation and revolutionary movement in Italy. At the same time that he is universalized, however, he is also personalized, as De André's wife at the time, Enrica (Puny) Rignon, said in an interview in 1972, "Questo Jones […] è Fabrizio stesso. O meglio la proiezione che Fabrizio vede in se stesso" (Sassi

[22] The song incorporates the flute along with the guitar, but the latter was the symbolic instrument of youth music in 1971, so the breaking of the accompanying instrument, the flute, would have been experienced as a much less traumatic loss, and one which was not immediately associated with the breaking of the means of contemporary musical communication. Rather, the fiddle in the original Jones's day and the guitar in De Andre's day, are the crucial instruments (Marshall 1).

135). Masters' Jones had babbled of community fish frys and dances, and had remembered Abe Lincoln's address, while De André's Jones remembers much less romantic and certainly less communal experiences: "Lui sì sembra di sentirlo / cianciare ancora delle porcate / mangiate in strada nelle ore sbagliate / sembra di sentirlo ancora / dire al mercante di liquore / 'Tu che lo vendi cosa ti compri di migliore?'" ("La collina" ll. 40-45). This irreverent alteration of the original memories sounds like an experience De André would have remembered from his own life, during much of which he struggled with (or, perhaps, luxuriated in) alcoholism.[23] But it also reflects a change in tone and point of view that is consistent with what Boym predicts of reflective nostalgia, which can be "ironic and humorous" (epub) and which presents "an ethical and creative challenge" (epub). De André, indeed, appears to challenge Jones's original memories and their utopian aspect. He questions the very logic of utopia or communal paradise, preferring as a solution, instead, the delirium of intoxication. In the final verse of "La collina," Jones's question to the liquor merchant, "You who sell alcohol, what do you buy that's better?", is not only utterly ironic,[24] it also hints at the anarchical, subversive, and anti-authoritianism at the heart of De André's Jones, who does not look back at any utopia, or forward to one. Rather, he cannot conceive of one at all and is in search, like Dionysus, the sometimes-father of Pan, of Nietzsche's revelation through bacchanal (*The Birth of Tragedy*).

This association of Jones with De André was not only noted by his wife at the time; many are the scholars and fans who have come to the same conclusion, from Fernanda Pivano in her interview of De André on the album cover, to the 2001 *La Stampa* article: "De André, il suonatore Jones del Sessantotto" (Orlando, Kindle loc. 1767). This association of the fictional narrator with

[23] When asked in January of 1974 if it's true that he drinks a lot, De André responds: "Credo di bere molto di più di una persona che beve normalmente. Per me è uno stimolante, una forza che mi aiuta a lavorare e a pensare meglio. Alle volte, invece, mi aiuta a non pensare. Ma tu che mi domandi perché bevo, tu ci hai mai provato?" (Sassi 143).

[24] As Massimo Vizzaccaro points out as well (81).

the historical *cantautore* in 1971 meant that Jones was implicitly politicized in a contemporary key; as he had symbolized antifascism through Pivano and Pavese, so he came to symbolize at least some aspects of the student revolution in the early 1970s.[25] And there were few public figures who would have more effectively lent that weight to Jones than De André, of whom Americanist scholar, Mauro Vizzaccaro, states: "Per gli ex giovani di quelle generazioni lì, De André ha rappresentato *il* maestro indiscusso in tempi di tumulto—sociale, politico, religioso, di costume" (emphasis original 78). Indeed, it is precisely via association with De André that Jones takes on his most revolutionary aspect. Surprisingly, however, it not through any political or ideological message, but, rather, in De André-Jones's subversion of the myth of the musician himself, which begins in 1971's "Il suonatore Jones" and is completed in 1972's "Amico fragile",[26] when De André resolves his libertarian message of 'libertà'.

"Amico fragile" is reminiscent of "Il suonatore Jones" in its opening line—"Evaporato in una nuvola rossa" (l. 1) as compared to "In un vortice di polvere" (l. 1)—and both go on to describe a musician who drinks too much, who is raucous, and whose music is demanded by his community. In 1971, De André's Jones chose to leave his fields to be run over by nettles because freedom, for him, was awakened when he played music for his community: "Libertà l'ho vista svegliarsi / Ogni volta che ho suonato" ("Il suonatore Jones" ll. 15-16). Yet, the first-person narrator of 1972's "Amico fragile" is a slave to this music,[27] which he no longer feels has the power to truly communicate, and he refers to his songs as "i miei figli / [che] parla[no] ancora male e ad alta voce

[25] American literature scholar at the Università di Siena, Gianfranca Balesta, has stated as much: "in Italia […] il successo è stato grande in epoche diverse e contrapposte, come gli anni Trenta e Quaranta del fascismo e della guerra gli anni Sessanta-Settanta dell'idealismo e della ribellione" (Balestra 106).

[26] De André wrote "Amico fragile" in the summer of 1972 but it was not released on an album until 1975's *Volume 8*.

[27] Discussing the genesis of the song, De André says: "C'erano medici, avvocati, gente di un certo livello culturale, e io volevo parlare, sentire il loro parere su quello che accadeva. Ed invece anche quella sera, come tutte le sere, finii con la chitarra in mano. Ho cantato delle canzoni, poi ho riprovato a parlare con loro; niente, hanno cercato di rimettermi la chitarra in mano" (Sassi 339-340).

di me" (ll. 36-37). He goes on to say: "potrei barattare la mia chitarra e il suo elmo / con una scatola di legno che dicesse perderemo" (ll. 38-39), suggesting that he has given up on his instrument, that it is as good as useless. Indeed, the status of the guitar is reminiscent of Jones' fiddle in the original epitaph, whose broken strings had been recuperated in De André's 1971 song, and the narrator of "Amico fragile" gives up playing too in the end, choosing after considering many options, to leave the social gathering (ll. 44-45). The music stops for the narrator as it had for Jones, although their instruments are broken for different reasons and although De André, the song's narrator, makes in his own life a few years later precisely the opposite of Jones's choice.

De André, in fact, chooses to take a step back from music and to take up farming, stating, "Sono traumatizzato dalle canzoni: ho inseguito attraverso le canzoni il pane quotidiano. Per me, scrivere una canzone e andare in nevrosi è la stessa cosa. Faccio canzoni per mestiere. Invece, non è per denaro che allevo vacche" (Sassi 171). This claim brings to mind an important aspect of the choice, for both Jones and De André—*non è per denaro*—and it fully illustrates that, far from Masters' prescriptive delineation of 'freedom', for De André, music is not equal to freedom, rather each man's conception of freedom will necessarily be individual. Because of Jones's association with De André, he is now at once a hero who can sing, *Libertà l'ho vista dormire nei campi coltivati, libertà l'ho vista svegliarsi ogni volta che ho suonato*, as well as its uncanny opposite, *Libertà l'ho vista dormire ogni volta che ho suonato, libertà l'ho vista svegliarsi nei campi coltivati*. In either case, it seems, Jones will remain forever 'senza rimpianti', for he has come to emblematize in Italy, through his many transformations, an absolute devotion to personal freedom. While Masters' "Fiddler Jones" is a nostalgic epitaph, yearning for a national utopia lost in an irrecoverable past, "Il suonatore Jones" in Italy is a reminder that in radical free choice there is still the promise of future happiness.

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