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CONTEMPORARY SONGS AND TRADITIONAL LITERATURE IN THE EFL CLASSROOM

1. Using songs in the EFL classroom

The most difficult goal an EFL teacher aspires to achieve is undoubtedly succeeding in involving L2 students in the study of English language and literature. Young learners, in fact, tend to use books and English teaching materials only to get good marks in the subject. Therefore, a number of suggestions have been made to overcome this problem by trying to create an atmosphere in the class that would encourage adolescent learners to appreciate the acquisition of the foreign language.

Several studies (c.f. CRANMER and LAROY 1992, SCHOEPP 2001, GRAHAM 2006) have revealed that teaching English language and English literature through songs can be a useful didactic method to capture the students' interest in the activities and themes developed in class. It is generally recognized, in fact, that students can easily interiorise a foreign language by working on songs for several reasons: first of all, as Ferradas Moi (2003) theorises, materials based on songs focus on the use of particular grammar structures or on recognisable morpho/lexical elements that can promote the acquisition of syntactical and grammatical patterns¹. Learning new words and new lexical chains can be easier, and sometimes even automatic, thanks to the structure of the songs themselves and to the presence of a refrain that helps listeners memorise the most significant lines, thus also enriching their vocabulary.

Using music in the EFL classroom also allows students to improve their listening skills and helps them learn the right pronunciation of English words.

In addition, Ferradas Moi points out that the topics of the songs used during the class can often foster discussion among students on relevant themes that are generally linked to our life in the XX and XXI centuries. Therefore, these materials can help learners improve their speaking abilities by encouraging the development of pragmatic strategies through the exchange of opinions.

The writers conclude by maintaining that materials based on rock lyrics also promote intercultural awareness and that the analysis of songs can represent a method to help learners become aware of, and reflect on, the cultural phenomena of their own society, as well as others and especially the English-speaking ones. For this reason, Byram, Nichols and Stevens (2001) point out that one of L2 teachers' tasks is "to facilitate learners' interaction with some small part of another society and its culture, with the purpose of relativising learners' understanding of their own cultural values, beliefs and behaviours"². Consequently, pop and rock lyrics contribute to stimulating students' curiosity about other traditions and about specific situations.

This process of linguistic acquisition and cultural awareness is due to the fact that learners can relate to modern songs better than traditional poetry, prose or drama. This common perception is due to the role that music itself plays in our contemporary world and it is often emphasised by the interest that students have in famous singers that burst onto the scene. Furthermore, contemporary songs are considered to be more authentic than traditional literature since they are part of the learners' routine and are usually associated with a remarkable or unusual event in their life. It has been demonstrated (CRANMER and LAROY 1992, FERRADAS MOI 2003) that students are interested in analysing and revising song texts because it makes them feel as if they are entering into the second language's real world. For this reason, the pop and rock lyrics found in songs can be useful in motivating a young learner's interest in English literature.

According to Ferradas Moi "as both a product and a producer, rock lyrics lend themselves easily to the development of multimedia projects in the classroom: audio, video clips and Internet-based materials can not only liven up the EFL class but also help it pass the test of relevance that adolescent students are always submitting it to"³.

The effectiveness of this co-operation between contemporary music and traditional literature is demonstrated by Schoepp (2001) when he claims that using songs during foreign language acquisition can encourage a positive attitude towards school involvement and homework. In fact, it is widely acknowledged that adolescent learners love listening to music, and song lyrics can affect them emotionally in many ways. In addition, Cullen (2004) draws teachers' attention to

the most relevant aspects of songs, suggesting five wide areas of analysis related to:

- Subject matter
- Meaning of the song's vocabulary
- Poetic structure
- People and places in songs
- Songs as a reflection of culture⁴.

Lastly, students may see the inclusion of songs in the lesson as a different way to approach English literature, offering the possibility, through the topics of the songs, to remember literary contents more easily or to associate music to a specific author or to a literary movement. Connections between songs and literary texts or historical events could be useful for young learners to reflect on and memorise dates, literary characteristics, significant events, different interpretations of texts and theories connected to the writers studied during the year.

As Thomson and Maglioni (2004) highlight through their activities⁵, building a bridge between literature and modern songs is important because it can provide students with the possibility of understanding that literature is not a fixed and old world but is still very much alive in our cultural dimension through different artistic manifestations such as, for example, contemporary songs. As they explain, singers and song writers have often reinvented and transformed literary masterpieces using their themes or structures to elaborate, undermine, decode or adapt these texts to the modern environment.

As a result, literature can approach the contemporary world even when the texts come from the Middle Ages or from the Renaissance fostering, as Ferradas Moi (2003) maintains⁶, trans-textual relationships between the past and the present, inviting young learners to explore English literature in an unconventional way.

2. The project

These studies have led me to carry out my own investigation by suggesting this project to a Class IV (Liceo) of a high school in Italy. Thirty students were involved in this project. They were invited to work in groups of two or three and were asked to choose a song that could be linked to one of the literary works or themes developed during the school year. They were expected to prepare a presentation for the rest of the class and write a brief composition explaining the reasons for choosing that particular song and highlighting the connection between the song and the English literature work or theme.

After spending about half an hour to review the whole literary syllabus studied in the previous months, the students were well aware of the multiple choices they had to create inter-textual relationships within the following literary themes and works:

- The English Renaissance
- Renaissance Prose:
 - Utopia* (Thomas More)
- Renaissance Poetry:
 - One day I wrote her name* (Edmund Spenser)
 - Sonnet 18, Sonnet 60 and Sonnet 130* (William Shakespeare)
 - A lecture upon a shadow* (John Donne)
- Renaissance Drama:
 - Doctor Faustus* (C. Marlowe)
 - Romeo and Juliet* (W. Shakespeare)
 - The Merchant of Venice* (W. Shakespeare)
 - Hamlet* (W. Shakespeare)
 - King Lear* (W. Shakespeare)
 - The Tempest* (W. Shakespeare)

Othello (W. Shakespeare)

- Literature during the Puritan Age:

Paradise Lost (John Milton)⁷.

3. The model-presentation

Although the students were really interested in this project, they had never worked thinking of an inter-textual bridge between traditional teaching materials and audio, video clips or Internet-based materials before. So providing them with an initial model-presentation of a song seemed useful in helping them understand how the song could be chosen, which elements should be stressed and which strategies were to be adopted to make a clear and interesting presentation. Furthermore, the first presentation aimed at raising the students' awareness of the implicit relations that can exist between traditional literature and contemporary songs. Therefore, the learners' first role was not that of presenters but that of active listeners.

The first song presented by myself as the teacher was *Romeo and Juliet* written by Dire Straits in 1980.

A love-struck Romeo *sings* a streetsus serenade / Laying *everybody* low with a lovesong that he made / Finds a convenient *streetlight* steps out of the shade / Says *something* like you and me babe how about it? / Juliet says hey it's / Romeo you nearly gimme a heart *attack* / He's underneath the *window* she's singing hey la my boyfriend's back / You shouldn't come around here *singing* up at people like that / *Anyway* what you gonna do about it? / Juliet the dice were loaded from the start / And I bet and you exploded in my *heart* / And I forget I *forget* the movie song / When you / wanna realise it was just that the time was *wrong* Juliet? / Come up on different *streets* they both were streets of shame / Both dirty both mean yes and the dream was just the same / And I dreamed your dream for *you* and your dream is real / How can you *look* at me as if I was just another one of your deals? / Where you can fall for chains of silver you can fall / for chains of gold / You can fall for pretty *strangers* and the promises they hold / You promised me *everything* you / promised me think and thin / Now you just says oh Romeo yeah you know I used to have a scene with him Juliet when we made love you used to *cry* / You said I love you like the stars above I'll love you till I *die* / There's a / place for us you know the movie song / When you gonna *realise* it was just that the time was wrong Juliet? / I can't do the talk *like* they talk on TV / And I can't do a love song like the way it's meant to be / I can't do everything but I'd do *anything* for you / I can't do anything except be in love with you / And all I do is miss you and the *way* we used to be / All do is keep the beat and bad company / All I do is kiss you through the bars of a *rhyme* / Julie I'd do the stars with / you any time / Juliet when we made love you used to cry / You said I love you like the stars above I'll love you till I die / There's a place for us you know the movie song / When you gonna realise it was just that the time was wrong Juliet ? / A love-struck Romeo sings a streetsus serenade / Laying everybody low with me a lovesong that he made / Finds a / convenient streetlight steps out of the shade / Says something like you and me babe how about it?

The presentation was divided into the following steps:

- First of all, the students listened to the song once; then they listened to the song again filling in the gaps (the words in italics were missing). After this, students were asked to underline any unknown terms.
- Secondly, half an hour was spent in understanding the song. This operation presented some difficulties because students found the structure of the text quite problematic. Moreover, there were many new words, which were explained either through English synonyms by the teacher or with Italian words or expression by other students in the class.
- Lastly, the class focused on the link between the song and the English literary dimension. Given the fact that the song was based on the Shakespearian tragedy, the analysis aimed at showing that the song had a number of elements in common with the famous *balcony scene* analysed during the previous week. Learners realized that, although he was depicting modern characters and using every day expressions, Mark Knopfer's aim was to tell Romeo and Juliet's passionate story in an up-to-date version, presenting the most famous dialogue between the two Veronese lovers, Juliet's surprise in seeing Romeo under her window and Romeo's will to overcome all kinds of difficulties to stay with his woman.

4. Students' presentations

Every week, each group comprising two or three students presented a song standing near the blackboard in front of the

listeners. The presentation and the following activities lasted no more than 40 minutes. Each group organised their presentation mainly following four steps:

- Listening to the song;
- Presentation of the singer/group;
- Analysis of the relation between the song chosen and the literary work;
- Activities⁸.

4.1 Forever Young (Bob Dylan - 1976)

May God bless and keep you always, / May your wishes all come true, / May you always do for others / And let others do for you. / May you build a ladder to the stars / And climb on every rung, / May you stay forever young, / Forever young, forever young, / May you stay forever young. / May you grow up to be righteous, / May you grow up to be true, / May you always know the truth / And see the lights surrounding you. / May you always be courageous, Stand upright and be strong, / May you stay forever young, / Forever young, forever young, / May you stay forever young. / May your hands always be busy, / May your feet always be swift, / May you have a strong foundation / When the winds of changes shift. / May your heart always be joyful. / May your song always be sung, / May you stay forever young, / Forever young, forever young, / May you stay forever young

Literary Link: this song was chosen because the theme can be related to *Sonnet 60* written by William Shakespeare in 1609. Both the song and the poem are addressed to a young man, and Bob Dylan's aim is to try to immortalise this man's youth, considering it as the spring of our life. According to the students' interpretation, the American singer's use of lines can be associated with the Shakespearian one. In fact, the everlasting nature of poetry, which is reaffirmed in the last lines of the poem in the hope that the young man will thus be immortalised, can be implicitly seen in Dylan's effort to wish this young man to stay *forever young*, overcoming the destructive effects of time which Shakespeare also referred to.

Considering the structure of the American text and its repetitions, the students maintained that the song could also be considered as a sort of prayer that implores the immortality of human youth and beauty.

Activities: after answering several questions from the audience on the text and its translation, the group involved the other students by hanging a blank poster on the wall and asking them to write the line of the song they considered mostly meaningful. The students also focused on the use of *may* and the some other modal verbs: *can –could* and *might*.

Towards the end, the students engaged in a brief discussion about the song and its literary link.

4.2 I could die for you (Red Hot Chili Peppers - 2002)

Something inside the cards / I know is right / Don't want to live / Somebody else life / This is what I want to be / And this is what I give to you / Because I get it free / She *smiles* while I do my time / I could die for you / Oh this life I choose / I'm here to be your only go-between / To tell you of the *sights* / These eyes have seen / What I really want to do is / Turn it into *motion* / Beauty that I can't abuse / You know that I'd use my *senses* to / You can see that / It's only everywhere / I'd take it all and then / I'd find a way to share / Come along and / go / Along with me / Wander with me yo / It's all for *free* / I could die for you / Whatchu wanna do / Oh this life I choose / Come again and tell me / Where you want to go / What it means for me / To be with you alone / Close the door and / No one has to know / How we are / Come along and go / Along with me / Wander with me yo / It's all for free / I could die for you / Whatchu want to do / Oh this *life* I choose.

Literary link: this American song written by one of the most famous American groups can be associated to the Shakespearian play *Romeo and Juliet*. In the young presenters' opinion, in fact, the aim of this text is to depict a passionate and deep love story between two young lovers. Analysing the text, we find no explicit reference to the lovers' ages, but we can perceive the speaker's need and desire to run away with his woman to live a life built only on their dreams and on harmony, with no care for the world outside. This aspect can be linked to the intensity and absolutism of Romeo and Juliet's passion, which is typical of first true love experiences. Like the Shakespearian male character, the protagonist of this American song, who expresses his sorrow directly to the listeners, would be ready to die for his lover.

Activities: after filling in the gaps (the words in italics were missing), the group opened an interesting discussion on the role of love in our lives. Students were asked to work in pairs and answer these four questions: Have you ever been in love? / Which role does love play in your life? / Would you sacrifice your life for someone or something? / What would you sacrifice for the one you love?

After discussing these question in pairs, every student had to relate his/her interlocutor's opinion to the whole class. Applying the usual English lesson format, presenters wrote the key points of the discussion on the blackboard, thus allowing other students to follow other opinions more easily and to note down any new words. The speaking session allowed students to express their feelings and ideas using their linguistic and pragmatic competence.

4.3 Love Street (The Doors - 1968)

She lives on Love Street / Lingers long on Love Street / She has a house and garden / I would like to see what happens / She has robes and she has monkeys / Lazy diamond studded flunkies / She has wisdom and knows what to do / She has me and she has you / She has wisdom and knows what to do / She has me and she has you / I see you live on Love Street / There's this store where the creatures meet / I wonder what they do in there / Summer Sunday and a year / I guess I like it fine, so far / She lives on Love Street / Lingers long on Love Street / She has a house and garden / I would like to see what happens.

Literary link: in order to completely understand the connection between this American song and the passages in English literature analysed during the year, students found it interesting to give an in-depth presentation of the group and, above all, Jim Morrison's life and his way of thinking. After this thorough presentation, another student suggested the song's possible links to topics within our literary syllabus, giving the audience two interesting readings of the American text. The first considered the possibility that, like earlier traditional poems and plays, the song is a way for the author to celebrate his lover, Pamela Coursan. In this case the main theme of the song is love between humans, just like, the students maintained, some of the Shakespearian sonnets and plays we had dealt with (for example *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*). The second interpretation focused on the analysis of the woman's qualities that the song itself depicts. Morrison's lover is, in fact, represented as a wise, clever and independent woman. Students linked this female image with the Shakespearian representations of women during the Renaissance, stating that, in the contemporary text, the woman shares the same characteristics as Shakespeare's female characters.

Activities: the group asked other students to think of and list the Shakespearian female characters they had encountered and analysed during the previous months. They then wrote the four names (Juliet, Desdemona, Portia and Jessica) on the blackboard. Other students were asked to list the most important qualities and abilities of these women, stressing their role in the development of the plays and their attitude towards men and their society. At the end of this presentation, the blackboard was divided into four large sections, each of them showing these women's characteristics.

After this brief but detailed list, the students continued with a more general discussion on the role of women during the Renaissance.

4.4 Mezzogiorno (Jovannotti – 2008)

Caselli d'autostrada tutto il tempo si consuma / Ma Venere riappare sempre fresca dalla schiuma / La foto della scuola non mi assomiglia più / Ma i miei difetti sono tutti intatti / E ogni cicatrice è un autografo di Dio / Nessuno potrà vivere la mia vita al posto mio / Per quanto mi identifichi nel battito di un altro / Sarà sempre attraverso questo cuore / E giorno dopo giorno passeranno le stagioni / Ma resterà qualcosa in questa strada / Non mi è concesso più di delegarti i miei casini / Mi butto dentro vada come vada / Siamo come il sole a mezzogiorno baby / Senza più nessuna ombra intorno, baby / Un bacio e poi un bacio e poi un bacio e poi altri cento / Teoricamente il mondo è più leggero di una piuma / Nessun filo spinato potrà rallentare il vento / Non tutto quel che brucia si consuma / E sogno dopo sogno sono sveglio finalmente / Per fare i conti con le tue promesse / Un giorno passa in fretta e non c'è tempo di pensare / Muoviamoci che poi diventa sera / Siamo come il sole a mezzogiorno baby / Senza più nessuna ombra intorno...baby / Gente che viene / Gente che va / Gente che torna / Gente che sta / Il sole se la ride in mezzo al cielo / A guardare noi che ci facciamo il culo / E' un gioco / Mezzogiorno di fuoco / E' un lampo / Sulle armature / In guardia / Niente da capire / Mi specchio / In una goccia di sudore / Siamo come il sole a mezzogiorno baby / Senza più nessuna ombra intorno, baby.

Literary link: this was the only Italian song chosen by the students.

This text, written by one of Italy's most famous singer-songwriters, was compared with John Donne's poem "A lecture upon a shadow" because both texts reflect on the true nature of love. In the poem the metaphysical author compares the growth of love to the movement of the sun and to the different shadows it produces. He uses the metaphor of the sun to talk about the nature of love, which is at the highest point when the sun is directly overhead. During this period of time, the sun does not produce any kind of shadow.

Shadows, following this interpretation, symbolise incomprehension and misunderstandings. Proposing the same figure of speech, the Italian singer depicts a story in which the two lovers are living pure love without secrets or lack of complicity, and, although the song lacks the complexity of the poem, it is characterised by a symbolic language and by the idea that love between humans cannot be sustained for long. The song can be said to summarise the conception of a clear love without shadows. Lastly, the students also noticed that, in both these texts, the authors are directly addressing their lover.

Activities: the other students were asked to solve a crossword created by the members of the group.

To conclude the activities, a brief review of Metaphysical Poets and John Donne's work continued orally.

4.5 The Unknown Soldier (The Doors – 1968)

Wait until the war is over / And we're both a little older / The unknown soldier / Breakfast where the news is read / Television children fed / Unborn living, living, dead / Bullet strikes the helmet's head / And it's all over / For the unknown soldier / It's all over / For the unknown soldier / Hut / Hut ho hee up (x3) / Comp'nee / Halt / Preeee-zent! / Arms! / Make a grave for the unknown soldier / Nestled in your hollow shoulder / The unknown soldier / Breakfast where the news is read / Television children fed / Bullet strikes the helmet's head / And, it's all over / The war is over / It's all over / The war is over / Well, all over, baby / All over, baby / Oh, over, yeah / All over, baby.

Literary links: following the example of the third presentation, this group found it interesting to take into account the reason why the famous American singer wrote the song before talking about the relation between this text and English literature. First of all, they explained that this song was Jim Morrison's reaction to the Vietnam War and the way that conflict was portrayed in the American media at the time. Secondly, one of the presenters focused on the sounds produced in the middle of the song, stressing that The Doors created the sounds of what appears to be an execution. Considering that the principal themes of the American song were the Vietnam War and the dramatic effects it had upon people, this presentation aimed at revising the several wars we had studied.

Activities: after the comprehension of the song, the third presenter asked the audience to list the wars and the most important historical events we had studied together over the years.

Results:

- 1492: Columbus' arrival in America
- 1534: Act of Supremacy
- 1558: Coronation of Elizabeth I
- 1587: Execution of Mary Stuart "Queen of Scotland"
- 1588: Defeat of the Spanish Armada
- 1603: Death of Elizabeth
- 1642-8: English Civil Wars
- 1649: Execution of Charles I. Oliver Cromwell established the Commonwealth
- 1652: War with Holland
- 1660: The Restoration of the monarchy
- 1688: Glorious Revolution
- 1715 / 1745-6: Jacobite rebellions in Scotland
- 1756-63: the Seven Years' War

This activity was really useful because students were not only asked to list the events but also to briefly summarise their most significant features.

4.6 Real Life (Simple Minds – 1991)

Paula came from Washington with long golden hair / Twenty eight dollars in a fake silk purse and a leather skirt to wear / Shane came from Dublin town from the old world so green / Counterfeit ticket in to JFK in the land of his dreams / Street life's the only life they take a walk in the park / Even though they only met that day they were lovers by dark / Laid out on the morning skies he puts a ring on her hand / He said listen babe we gotta take what's ours do it or die / Quit dreaming this is real life baby / Real life's the only life what's it all about / Quit dreaming this is real life baby / Way out on the dock that night the colour is red / 23rd victim of a gangland war takes his last breath / Outside the sister cried she said the whole world's so mean / Heavyweight killer in the ring, turns killing machine / Quit dreaming this is real life baby / Real life's the only life what's it all about / Quit dreaming this is real life baby / All my love, you're my all / They way you move, you're in control / The way you talk, the way you dress / Your hands, your touch, your sweet caress. / All my love, you're the best, / Every little thing that I possess, / It's all emotion when you take control, / I can feel wild horses running in my soul. / Oh my love, all I see / The stars, the sun, the energy, / If this going to kill us then let it go, / Quit dreaming this is real life baby Up high above a desert sky where the space shuttles scream, / Sixteen men from a dying earth take their last dream. / Quit dreaming this is real life baby / Quit dreaming this is cheap life baby / Real life's the only life what's it all about / Quit dreaming this is cheap life baby / Your eyes, your lips, the shape of your mouth, / It's a sweet life baby / All my love, you're my all / The way you move, the way you go / I'm all emotion when you take control / I can feel wild horses running in my soul. / All my love, you're all I see / The stars, the sun, the energy, / The way you move, you're in control / Quit dreaming this is real life baby.

Literary link: this Scottish song was associated with the Shakespearian play *Romeo and Juliet*. According to the students, the song shares several elements with the tragedy. First of all both texts present a love story with an unhappy ending: in fact the male character of the song, like Romeo, dies because he is *victim of a gangland war*. The second aspect these texts have in common is the female characters' reaction. According to the students, Paula and Juliet cannot stop suffering for their loss, but each acts in a different way. The young Italian woman commits suicide, while the American girl keeps on living but gives way to grief. In the presenters' opinion this song could be considered as an up-to-date version of the Shakespearian play because, although the situation is set in contemporary places and written with a modern language, it includes the lovers' dream to live together forever and the tragic death of the male protagonist.

Activities: other students were invited to ask questions which the presenting group answered.

Students asked the following questions about the group: Who is Kim Kerr? / Who created the name *Simple Minds* and why? / How many members are there in the group? / Who founded the band? / What kind of music do they play? / Are they American? / Where do they live? / How old are they? / Are they still singing? / How many albums have they made? / When was their first album released?

4.7 Sympathy For the Devil (Rolling Stones – 1968)

Please allow me to introduce myself / I'm a man of wealth and taste / I've been around for a long, long years / Stole many a man's soul and faith / And I was 'round when Jesus Christ / Had his moment of doubt and pain / Made damn sure that Pilate / Washed his hands and sealed his fate / Pleased to meet you / Hope you guess my name / But what's puzzling you / Is the nature of my game / I stuck around St. Petersburg / When I saw it was a time for a change / Killed the zar and his ministers / Anastasia screamed in vain / I rode a tank / Held a general's rank / When the blitzkrieg raged / And the bodies stank / Pleased to meet you / Hope you guess my name, oh yeah / Ah, what's puzzling you / Is the nature of my game, oh yeah / I watched with glee / While your kings and queens / Fought for ten decades / For the gods they made / I shouted out, / "Who killed the Kennedys?" / When after all / It was you and me / Let me please introduce myself / I'm a man of wealth and taste / And I laid traps for troubadours / Who get killed before they reached Bombay / Pleased to meet you / Hope you guessed my name, oh yeah / But what's puzzling you / Is the nature of my game, oh yeah, get down, baby / Pleased to meet you / Hope you guessed my name, oh yeah / But what's confusing you / Is just the nature of my game / Just as every cop is a criminal / And all the sinners saints / As heads is tails / Just call me Lucifer / 'Cause I'm in need of some restraint / So if you meet me / Have some courtesy / Have some sympathy, and some taste / Use all your well-learned politesse / Or I'll lay your soul to waste, um yeah / Pleased to meet you / Hope you guessed my name, um yeah / But what's puzzling you / Is the nature of my game, um mean it, get down.

Literary link: this song was associated with Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* for one main reason: the presence of the devil.

The presentation was divided into two parts. First of all the presenters let the audience listen to the song, asking their classmates to fill in the gaps (the words in italics were missing). After that, they presented their interpretation, focusing on the connection between the British song and the text. These three students associated the speaker of this song, the devil, with Marlowe's figure of Lucifer: the XX century text aims to represent an evil figure that introduces his personality and his qualities, defining himself *a man of wealth and taste*. Moreover, the devil stresses that he has *been around for long, long years stole many a man's soul and faith* and this is exactly what he did in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, who, dissatisfied with the study of philosophy, law and divinity, turned his attention to the dark arts and world, signing a pact with the devil, who offered him limitless knowledge in exchange of his soul. In addition, students considered that the image the lyrics build of the devil recalls the traditional image of Lucifer, a supernatural being who steals men's souls after tempting them. The second impression the students highlighted was related to the idea that this being is represented as a real man who, on introducing himself, lets us understand his awareness of his influence and power. According to the students, this attempt at personification is doubtlessly inspired by several literary works. Furthermore, the group suggested the possibility of considering The Rolling Stones' representation of the devil as a reference to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which we meet an evil figure, totally aware of his power of mind, who salutes his new infernal kingdom and introduces himself and his plans⁹.

At the end of the presentation, one of the presenters suggested that it might be interesting to read Marlowe's entire masterpiece, focusing on this supernatural being.

Activities: The other students, however, found the comprehension of the song difficult and it required a second playing. After this activity, listeners were asked to read and translate the text. Considering the length of the text, the students were divided into smaller group and each worked on two stanzas. After ten minutes the presenters invited the audience to briefly summarise the meaning of the extract they had translated.

Inspired by the previous considerations, the teacher asked the students to write a paragraph following one of the tasks presented in their textbook: *If you had the chance to make a pact with the devil, what things would you ask for? Make a list of five priorities.*

This written exercise aimed at fostering students' creative writing and to help them elaborate on new ideas and opinions. Moreover, the production of this text, even if short, included the use of *if*-clauses, an area students often find problematic.

4.8 Evergreen (Westlife - 2002)

Eyes / Like a sunrise / Like a *rainfall* / Down my soul / And I *wonder* / I wonder why you look at me like that / What you're *thinking* / What's behind / Don't tell me / But it feels like love / I'm gonna take this *moment* / And make it last forever / I'm gonna give my *heart* away / And pray we'll stay together / Cause you're the one good *reason* / You're the only girl that I need / Cause you're more beautiful than I have ever seen / I'm gonna take this night / And make it evergreen / Touch / Like an angel / Like *velvet* to my skin / And I wonder / Wonder why you wanna stay the night / What you're *dreaming* / What's behind / Don't *tell* me / But it feels like love / I'm gonna take this moment / And make it last forever / I'm gonna give my heart away / And pray we'll stay together / Cause you're the one good reason / You're the only girl that I need / Cause you're more beautiful than I have ever seen / I'm gonna take this night / And make it evergreen / (don't tell me / But it feels like love) / I'm gonna take this moment / And make it last forever / I'm gonna give my heart away / And pray we'll stay together / Cause you're the one good reason / You're the only girl that I need / Cause you're more beautiful than I have ever seen / I'm gonna take this night / And make it evergreen.

Literary Link: this group of students chose this song because they thought it had many aspects in common with the Shakespearian tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. The first aspect they stressed was the title of the XX century text. It is called *Evergreen* because the artists want the feelings and the love for this girl to remain and last forever. This characteristic partially recalls the English tragedy where the two young characters attempt to give life to their love by trying to escape the fact that they come from two rival families who hate each other. Another important aspect in this song is that the artists are trying to describe the girl physically, exalting her beauty in every form. The students saw a similarity between this girl's and Juliet's description, maintaining that if this latter is described by Romeo through comparisons with the natural elements, the former is portrayed using the same poetic metaphors and by comparing the girl's eyes to a sunrise

and rainfall. In addition, the presenters stressed the importance of the eyes, which are one of the central elements in Romeo's speech, as he says that Juliet's eyes replace the stars in the sky. The group added another interesting similarity. They suggested that while Shakespeare compared Juliet to a bright angel due to her voice, the artist of the song compares the girl to an angel due to the soft way she is touching his skin.

Activities: Students were asked to fill in the gaps (the words in italics were missing) and to express their opinions about the song and the group's project in general.

Taking advantage of this song, the teacher asked students to focus on the use of: *As / Like; Wonder / ask; The form to be going to.*

4.9 We Looked Like Giants (Death Cab For Cutie - 2003)

God bless the daylight, the sugary smell of springtime / remembering when you were mine / in a still suburban town / when every Thursday I'd break those mountain passes / and you'd skip your early classes / and we'd learn how our bodies worked. / God damn the black night with all it's foul temptation / I become what I always hated / when I was with you then / we looked like giants in the back of my grey subcompact / fumbling to make contact / as the others slept inside / and together there / in a shroud of frost, the mountain air / began to pass from every pane of weathered glass / and I held you closer than anyone would ever get / do you remember the JAMC? / and reading aloud from magazines / I don't know about you but I swear on my name they could smell it on me / I've never been too good with secrets. / And together there / in a shroud of frost and mountain air / began to pass through every pane of weathered glass / and I held you closer.

Literary Link: as for other previous groups, the song these students chose was associated with *Romeo and Juliet*. It is particularly interesting to note that they preferred to focus on the idea of an adolescent passion, an aspect that other presenters had left out. According to these students, in fact, this American song, which clearly aims at describing a relationship between two young lovers, presents some similarities with the archetype of adolescent love embodied in *Romeo and Juliet*. This text could be considered as an up-to-date version of this kind of love, which is seen as an absolute and indestructible value. By analysing the title of the song itself, we can understand this idea of intensity and absolutism represented through the use of the word *Giants*. This term does not deal with the physical size of the individual, but implies a spiritual and emotional power which springs from the relationship with the partner.

Activities: The other students were asked to understand the song. They were then asked to reflect on the possible different metaphorical meanings of the word *Giants* used in the it. The discussion was oral.

4.10 Imagine (John Lennon – 1970)

Imagine there's no heaven / It's easy if you try / No hell *below* us / Above us only *sky* / Imagine all the people / Living for today. / Imagine there's no *countries* / It isn't hard to do / Nothing to kill or *die* for / And no religion too / Imagine all the people / Living life in *peace*. / You may say I'm a *dreamer* / But I'm not the only one / I *hope* someday you'll join us / And the *world* will be as one / Imagine no *possessions* / I wonder if you can / No need for greed or *hunger* / A *brotherhood* of man / Imagine all the people / *Sharing* all the world. / You *may* say I'm a dreamer / But I'm not the only *one* / I hope someday you'll *join* us / And the world will live as *one*.

Literary Link: this presentation was divided into three parts. Firstly, the students decided to stress the originality of this song by Lennon, explaining that it is considered by many listeners and critics as “the greatest musical gift to the world, twenty-two lines of graceful, plain-spoken faith in the power of the world, united in imagination and purpose, to repair and change itself”¹⁰ through the message it conveys. Unlike all the other groups, these students linked this song to Thomas More's main work *Utopia* due to the themes and the concepts that the song expresses. However, before presenting these similarities, the students pointed out that even the authors had certain aspects in common. First of all, although they lived in two different periods, both were characterised by several changes in the field of science, culture and society. Secondly, both authors faced the theme of justice, happiness and political idealism in their works.

In the second part of the project the presenters summarised the principal concepts of More's masterpiece, describing his island of Utopia as an ideal state ruled according to principles of harmony and justice. In the students' opinion the song reveals the same dream of a world where equity and stability rule over injustice and unrest. To conclude their presentation, these students presented a series of interesting observations related to Lennon's way of thinking, his song

and More's work:

Song: Imagine there's no countries, / It isn't hard to do, Nothing to kill or die for, / No religion too, / Imagine all the people / living life in peace.

Comment: as More wrote in *Utopia*, living in an ideal society means living in a world in which there is freedom of thought and where every religion is tolerated. In this place, war is considered as a horrible practice to be used only as a final alternative.

Song: Imagine no possessions, / I wonder if you can, / No need for greed or hunger, / A brotherhood of man, / Imagine all the people / Sharing all the world.

Comment: this idea could have been inspired by More's principles that include the abolition of private property in favour of communal ownership. This utopian environment would not have to face crimes, greed and social problems, such as poverty, pollution and disease.

Activities: the other students were asked to listen to the song and fill in the gaps (the words in italics were missing). After this exercise, the students showed great interest in this presentation and several questions were asked: Why did you choose to talk about Thomas More's *Utopia*?; Could you briefly summarise More's work?; Can you describe a utopian society?; Which are the main differences between a utopian society and a dystopian one? (this question was answered by the teacher); When did John Lennon write this song?; When was he assassinated?

These varied questions led to an interesting class debate on how Italian citizens could act in order to foster the development of a utopian society. The discussion was oral.

4.11 I am You (Depeche Mode - 2001)

You have bound my heart with subtle chains / So much pleasure that it feels like pain / So entwined now that we can't shake free / I am you and you are I / No escaping from the mess we're in / So much pleasure that it must be sin / I must live with this reality / I am yours eternally / There's no turning back / We're in this trap / No denying the facts / No, no, no / No excuses to give / I'm the one you're with / We've no alternative / No, no, no / Dark obsession in the name of love / This addiction that we're both part of / Leads us deeper into mystery / Keeps us craving endlessly / Strange compulsions that I can't control / Pure possession of my heart and soul / I must live with this reality / I am you and you are me (x4) / There's no turning back / We're in this trap / No denying the facts / No, no, no / No excuses to give / I'm the one you're with / We've no alternative / No, no, no.

Literary Link: like several other groups, these students focused on *Romeo and Juliet*, stressing that this song could be linked to the tragedy because of its references to the passion between two young lovers and their way of living their love. According to the students, this English song faithfully represents the probable environment created by the Veronese young lovers and their awareness of being guided by destiny. Yet, in the second and third stanzas, the character's thoughts highlight the lovers' condition of uneasiness. These words point out that they are unable to change the course of events and they probably will have to face difficult situations. In one of the presenters' opinions, the song reveals the same strong intensity of Romeo and Juliet's passion so that the title clearly describes the identification between the characters.

Activities: unfortunately this group had not thought of any further exercises, so the teacher suggested an open discussion on the role that love plays in our life and in our modern society. Surprisingly this debate brought all the students to share one single point of view: passion between two adolescents completely differs from adult love. All students maintained that adults generally live their relationship in a more balanced way, while passion lived by young lovers can be considered rather more unconditional. In any case, some of the students claimed that in both cases, people suffer the consequences of unhappy relationships.

4.12 I don't want to miss a thing (Aerosmith - 1998)

I could stay *awake* just to hear you breathing / Watch you smile while you are sleeping / While you're far away and dreaming / I could *spend* my life in this sweet surrender / I could stay lost in this moment forever / Every moment spent with you is a moment I *treasure* / Don't wanna close my eyes / Don't wanna fall asleep / 'Coz I'd miss you baby / And I don't wanna miss a thing / 'Coz even when I *dream* of you / The sweetest dream would never do / I'd still miss you baby

/ And I don't wanna miss a thing / Laying close to you / Feeling your heart *beating* / And I'm wondering what you're dreaming / Wondering if it's me you're seeing / Then I *kiss* your eyes / And thank God we're together / I just want to stay with you in this moment forever / *Forever* and ever / Don't wanna close my eyes / Don't wanna fall asleep / 'Coz I'd miss you baby / And I don't wanna miss a *thing* / 'Coz even when I dream of you / The sweetest dream would never do / I'd still miss you *baby* / And I don't wanna miss a thing / I don't wanna miss one smile / I don't wanna miss one kiss / I just wanna be with you / Right here with you just like this / I just wanna hold you close / Feel your *heart* so close to mine / And just stay here in this moment for all the rest of *time* / Baby, baby / Don't wanna close my eyes / Don't wanna fall asleep / 'Coz I'd miss you baby / And I don't wanna miss a thing / 'Coz even when I dream of you / The sweetest *dream* would *never do* / I'd still miss you baby / And I don't wanna miss a thing.

Literary Links: this last group looked for an up-to-date version of Romeo and Juliet's love. They chose a song written by one of the most famous American bands in the late XX century. Considering the multiple analyses of this Shakespearian play that the other groups had already presented, this group could only add a few new elements with their presentation. Perhaps one of the most interesting aspects they analysed focused on the idea that both the male and female characters need to experience every single moment of their life together without missing anything. Moreover, taking into account the first two lines of the refrain, the students pointed out that they could be linked to the last part of the tragedy, when Juliet drinks the potion that will make her sleep and finally condemn the two lovers to death.

Activities: the class was asked to fill in the gaps (the words in italics were missing) and to focus on these linguistic aspects: I don't wanna / I don't want to; 'coz / because.

5. Evaluation

The project aimed at helping students re-evaluate literary themes as a way to understand the social-cultural heritage of English-speaking countries, according to the idea that literature could be seen as a mirror of old as well as modern themes. Moreover, such a project aimed at promoting the students' autonomy in working on a personal presentation, which included the choice of the song, the structure of the project and the oral presentation to the rest of the class. In addition, this activity was also important in encouraging all students to participate and use the foreign language to interact with the other members of the class and to improve linguistic as well as pragmatic skills. Therefore, the objectives of the project aimed at involving students according to two different but cooperating lines. The first, in fact, could be considered as more didactic, while the other aimed at allowing shy students to present a project that they themselves had created, and to force the most interested students, who usually interact with the teacher and take active part to every lesson, to listen to other classmates' points of view and ideas.

In the light of these observations, the students' work was evaluated according to the following project-specific criteria:

Clarity of the explanation:

1. did all students in the group speak for an equal time period (organisation of turns)?
2. did the presenters speak a correct English (grammar, syntax)?
3. were the presenters fluent (fluency and pronunciation)?

Development of the project:

How did the presenters develop the project?

1. was the presentation well-organised?
2. did the presenters highlight when s/he was starting an important point?
3. did the presenters give a clear conclusion?

Comprehensibility of the project:

Effectiveness in presenting the project to other students:

1. was the project attractive to the other students?
2. did the presentation create a favourable atmosphere for learning and improving the students' competence in English?
3. did the presentation encourage the actualisation of literary themes through rock lyrics?

4. did the song chosen develop intercultural awareness?
5. were activities proposed by students original and involving?
6. did activities proposed by students encourage the use of students' oral skills?

Oral presentation was then evaluated according to the evaluation criteria of the school in the field of foreign languages.

6. Conclusions

As recent research in applied linguistics points out (CRANMER and LAROY 1992, SCHOEPP 2001, GRAHAM 2006), using songs in the EFL classroom can encourage the students' interest and involvement. The learners in this project, in fact, saw it as a way to actively take part in the development of class activities and therefore took the assignment seriously, working autonomously at home in order to develop a well-reasoned project. Moreover, just as Cranmer and Laroy (1992) observe¹¹, those students who generally seemed shy or uninterested during the traditional literary explanations, showed true interest in this project and took part enthusiastically in class debates and in the activities that each group devised.

As Carter (2005) suggests, music is indeed not only a universal code and a motivating way to teach English, but also an occasion for students to express their opinions on different topics and to improve their oral or written skills. Listening and understanding the different songs presented by the groups helped the learners' lexical enrichment because, as Graham points out, "using rhythm to introduce new vocabulary offers our students a very fast track for learning"¹².

Furthermore, students explained that one of the reasons why they worked hard on their presentations was the fact that they saw the project as something really personal and original. The choice of the song and the connections to the literary world seemed to give the students the possibility to show the teacher their involvement in English classes and their desire to improve their linguistic and communicative skills.

Thanks to the development of this project, the usually static atmosphere typical of literary explanations was abandoned in order to make space for a dynamic environment in which the students could learn by using their own activities and exercises, thus creating a dimension in which all students did their best to understand the others' presentations and to interact using the foreign language. Communication, in fact, came naturally from the themes students presented because, as Cranmer and Laroy (1992) explain, debates and exchanges of opinions arise spontaneously as an automatic answer to the song the students have listened to.

This enthusiasm and the desire to actively take part to the lesson were also due to the fact that adolescent learners consider pop and rock songs as a way to be closer to the real English-speaking world, avoiding, for a while, the English in their student's books. Although this aspect is undoubtedly positive, it sometimes caused discipline problems, because the overall numbers of students often undermined the regular course of activities. Some students, in fact, tended to interact with other class mates without waiting their turn, often making the activities difficult to understand.

In spite of this fact, everyone in the class experienced the sensation of being listened to, not only as a student but also as a presenter of his/her own project.

Finally, on analyzing all the projects, it is clear that, even if many students had chosen different topics, most songs were linked to the Shakespearian tragedy *Romeo and Juliet*. At the beginning of my analysis I found this a limitation, but, after examining all the presentations carefully, I realized that the groups, besides choosing different songs, had associated the texts to Shakespeare's work due to different aspects. This is also evident from the activities the students' prepared since all the exercises concentrated on different topics or drew different new discussions.

Furthermore, the students learned to consider literature as a living world, creating interesting diachronic connections.

Therefore, having considered all these aspects, we may conclude that this project allowed students to analyze authentic materials and to improve their linguistic and pragmatic skills.

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3. C. FERRADAS MOI, "Materials forLanguage through Literature. Rocking the Classroom: Rock Poetry Materials in the EFL Class", in Tomlinson B., cit, pp. 406 – 421.

4. B. CULLEN, *Music and Song in discussion*, The Internet TESL Journal, Vol. IV, No. 10, October 1998.

5. Thomsom and Maglioni associate several songs with literary works, offering detailed activities with the purpose of making learners aware of the strict connection between the two texts. Two examples are: "A Hard Rain's A Gonna Fall" by Bob Dylan associated to "Lord Randal" and, more generally, to the old medieval ballad; "The Hall of Mirrors" by Kraftwerk associated to "The Picture of Dorian Gray".

6. C. FERRADAS MOI, "Materials forLanguage through Literature. Rocking the Classroom: Rock Poetry Materials in the EFL Class", in B. Tomlinson, cit, pp. 406 – 421.

7. All the extracts from literary texts and all the information related to the historical and socio-cultural background have been read and analysed in: G. THOMSON, S. MAGLIONI, *New Literary Links – Form the Origins to the Romantic Age*, Genoa /Canterbury, Black Cat Pub., 2004.

8. The most relevant aspects of each presentation will be reported herein, therefore the singers' biographies and information about groups will be omitted.

9. Reading only Satan's famous speech taken from Book I, students could not analyze this possible association in depth.

10. Bibliographical references were omitted by the presenters.

11. D. CRANMER, C. LAROY, *Musical Openings*, Harlow/Camterbury, Longman Pilgrims, 1992, p.3.

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