



Rock and drugs: multiliteracies and an aesthetics of violence for teenagers in school

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ABSTRACT. Current study discusses an approach of hard rock, in English, for high school students, from a multimodal perspective. The songs are analyzed in terms of their musicality and literariness and hard rock is considered a historically constituted complex cultural movement. The aesthetics of violence, present in the rock'n'roll scenario, specifically focused on the themes of drugs and alcohol abuse, is analyzed from the perspective of multiliteracies, for the development of teenagers' critical education. The paper is theoretically based on theory by Lévy (2010), Kress (2000) and Kalantzis and Cope (2000) for multiliteracy concepts and on Walser (1993) for the criticism on the musical language. Songs by the USA rock bands Metallica and Guns N'Roses are discussed.

Keywords: critical literacies, pop culture, Metallica, Guns N'Roses, high school education, identity development.

Rock e drogas: multiletramentos e uma estética da violência para adolescentes na escola

RESUMO. O objetivo deste trabalho é discutir uma abordagem de vertentes pesadas (*hard*) de *rock'n roll* em inglês no ensino médio a partir de uma perspectiva multimodal. Para tanto, as canções são analisadas em termos de sua musicalidade e literariedade e o *hard rock* é considerado um complexo movimento cultural, historicamente constituído. A estética da violência presente no cenário *rock'n roll*, em particular focalizada no abuso de drogas e álcool, é analisada da perspectiva dos multiletramentos, para uma construção de identidades e formação crítica de adolescentes. O trabalho é fundamentado teoricamente em Lévy (2010), Kress (2000) e Kalantzis e Cope (2000) para conceitos de multiletramentos e em Walser (1993) para a crítica da linguagem musical. São discutidas canções das bandas estadunidenses *Metallica* e *Guns N' Roses*.

Palavras-chave: letramentos críticos, cultura pop, *Metallica*, *Guns N' Roses*, ensino médio, construção de identidades.

Introduction

As water and oil, rock'n roll and school do not mix up. The verses 'We don't need no education' and 'Hey! Teacher! Leave us kids alone', from the song 'Another Brick in the Wall', by the progressive rock band Pink Floyd, still echo fresh in the ears of anybody who has been minimally introduced to this kind of culture, in spite of being recorded in 1979. The hard criticism of the band to a too strict education has become an international hit. A little bit sooner, in 1972, the USA hard rock vocalist Alice Cooper wished, in the song 'School's out', that after summer vacation school would have been blown up, solving definitely the problem of coming back to its oppression (School's out for Summer / School's out for ever / School's been blown to pieces).

Besides the negative image of school in the themes of the roots of hard rock, the so called 'rock'n roll attitude', linked to free sex and drug abuse does not match institutionalized education. Rebelliousness, sex, drugs and alcohol, besides

suicide and Satanism, are themes present in the lyrics of the most aggressive bands, together with a hard sonority, drums vigorously attacked and distorted guitars, harmony that surprises and shocks, less important melodic lines, screamed out vocals and dirty visual. No one of these goes smoothly with the ideal education in teachers and parents' point of view.

Nevertheless, rock'n roll is, for sure, an extremely complex cultural movement. In Brazil, although nowadays country music is the style people prefer, the influence of rock is outstanding, and the Brazilian rock bands refer to the same themes in their lyrics of their international counterparts. The Rock'n Rio festival, since 1985, even facing some difficulties, brings a public of about 100 thousand people a day. Iron Maiden (England) and Metallica (USA), today's biggest rock bands, attract a crowd of fans that scream their lyrics in English, in a country where this language is not commonly spoken. Apparently, they can even answer to the vocalists'

provocations, suggesting that they can understand something beyond the basic 'Yeah!' for a verbal communication between musicians and public.

This way, the objective of this paper is to discuss the possibility of an approach of rock'n roll in schools, with teenagers (high school), as a cultural movement that deals with drugs and violence, from the perspective of multiliteracies. For this proposal, the songs will be looked at as both literary products, regarding their lyrics, and music.

Multiliteracies

Nowadays, we cannot affirm that the formal way of writing, as schools have been historically developing, is the only way for communication between educated people. Since the invention of the press, writing has forged an epistemology that molds the linear reason and thought. All must be logically proved and transmitted, and the school has been making a great effort to perform its role of rendering the correct use of the written language possible at the same time that people have access to a socially privileged way of thought in which science, philosophy, history and law are not only expressed through writing, but are constituted by it (LÈVY, 2010). Nevertheless, we can also observe other forms of production and circulation of thought that do not follow linear principles so clearly as writing, but also establish human communicative relations. In an age when virtual communication has been blurring time and space strict boundaries, and creating effective social movements, other modes of communication, besides writing, present themselves for research.

For Lèvy (2010), the fall of prose, nowadays, may represent the fall of the kind of knowledge linked to it, in other words, the fall of science, philosophy, history and law in the way we have been conceiving them up to now. That is not a comfortable premise for several educators. In a technological society, we have watched ideas and feelings being shared in different modes and in a great speed, different from writing. Perhaps it is still a bit premature to affirm that we are watching a movement back to orality. At the same time, we still do not know for sure the consequences of such processes in the thought formation for the future generations. However, it's quite clear that schools have the challenge to look at other modes of expression, besides writing, if their goal is to prepare critical citizens.

Kress (2000) also discusses the dislodgement of the central position of the written language while more visual means of communication have increased prominence. Kress also calls the attention to other means of expression, different from the

visual, and music is one of them, besides the body and its movements. For him,

[...] the actual elites of Western Europe decided to break the continuous chain between music and its everyday appearance and music and an aesthetic form, or music in its ritual aspects. A deep division has been produced, so that the latter two have remained the subject of attention for the elites: 'not' now as everyday forms of representation and communication, but as forms which belong entirely in the domain of the aesthetic and of good manners. Music is now no longer seen as a form of communication but as a means of expression; the same as happened with the visual mode and others (KRESS, 2000, p. 182, author's emphasis).

Writing, thus, is the mode of communication par excellence at school; it is the vehicle through which all knowledge circulates, as well as the expression of needs and personal relations. If an individual does not verbalize information or feelings, it is, as a rule, as if these elements do not exist in the school environment.

Thus, different modes of expression imply different forms of meaning and the relations of the individuals with such possible meanings, or epistemologies. In other words, diversified literacies, different from the literacy via written word, must be provided by schools. Kalantzis and Cope (2000) discuss the need of schools changing their roles towards a more pluralist education, and an approach towards multiliteracies could be a valid suggestion. For the authors, the starting point is not the generic individual neither learning as an identically replicated process. Rather, a pluralist education would contemplate

[...] multiple languages and dialects, multiple community histories and life experiences, multiple intelligences, in sum, multiple ways of being human (KALANTZIS; COPE, 2000, p. 148).

Music, as a mode of expression, is a way of making sense for several groups of people and, as such, may be appreciated, discussed and transformed in literacy also in schools, together with a more literary way of regarding the lyrics of the songs. For such purpose, the musical language and its visual surroundings, regarding rock bands, with their effects of social interaction, must also be taken into consideration. When talking about music inserted in the pop culture, we cannot narrow the considerations only to the study of the lyrics in schools. Looking only at the words on the page the multimodal approach does not happen; writing, and the epistemology that encompasses it, would keep its central position.

Heavy rock culture and the academic criticism

A search for contemporary academic articles on heavy rock, in different fields of knowledge, reveals some interest in the cultural movement. Most part of the studies focuses on the associations between heavy rock, heavy metal in particular, to behavior disturbances. An article published in Turkey, for instance, reports a study that aims at examining heavy metal bar patrons in Istanbul looking for signs of psychiatric disorders (EKINCI et al., 2011). The researchers argue that

[...] a number of previous studies have shown that a heavy metal music preference may be associated with an increased risk of drug abuse, academic failure, family problems, recklessness, impulsive behaviors, depression and suicide (EKINCI et al., 2011, p. 307).

Nevertheless, according to the authors, such studies have been developed in western countries, so their research wished to check if such characteristics are present in Turkey, or Islamic societies, as well. After the conduction of questionnaires, the researchers concluded that the population investigated was found to have “[...] high levels of ADHD, social anxiety, and depressive symptoms in comparison with the estimated ratios of the general population” (EKINCI et al., 2011, p. 311).

In Hong Kong, a master thesis on public health investigates the association between heavy metal and risk behavior in adolescents (CHAN, 2013). The author has conducted research studies from 1983 to 2013 about the theme and has concluded that

[...] there is evidence that Heavy Metal Music does have an association with adolescent risk/problem behavior and suicide. But further researches are needed in different countries to increase the generalizability and establish the hypothesis of whether there is a relationship between them (CHAN, 2013, p. 3).

Another article, published in the USA, investigates the influence of personality and personal differences in the preferences for heavy metal. The study, developed with 414 British individuals, points at an association with

[...] higher openness to experience, more negative attitudes toward authority, lower self-esteem, greater need for uniqueness, and lower religiosity (SWAMI et al., 2013, p. 377).

Facing the examples before, one may conclude that academic research, mainly in the field of public health, seem to corroborate the assumption that heavy rock may be hazardous to people, ‘especially teenagers’. Although they do not present themselves

as conclusive premises, such studies point out at clear relations between individual and social behavior disturbances and heavy rock listeners.

At the same time, when the researches focus different fields of knowledge, other aspects come to discussion. The paper ‘Song lyrics in contemporary metal music as counter-hegemonic discourse: and exploration of three themes’, published by the journal *Free Inquiry in Creative Sociology*, in 2005, analyses three themes in contemporary heavy metal lyrics: psychological chaos, nihilism/violence, and alternative religiosity. The authors, from the Pacific University and the Texas Tech University, in the USA, argue for the idea that

[...] the lyrical and aesthetic content of metal music are integral aspects of youth identity and reflect the power struggles young people have with contemporary culture. Moreover, metal music is not just a forum for young people to vent amorphous and undefined aggressions, but instead, speaks ‘directly’ to them (RAFALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 131, author’s emphasis).

Thus, the authors are particularly concerned with the cultural form of metal music “[...] and the degree to which this musical genre demonstrates a political reciprocity with young people” (RAFALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 131). Rafalovich and Schneider stress the academic and lay problem on the accounts on metal music: for them, most discussions exclusively focus “[...] on the moral and social savoir faire of the genre’s audience and artists [...]” (RAFALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 133) rendering the significance of metal music as reflecting the power asymmetry between youth culture and dominant culture to a scarce approach. The authors emphasize that such perspectives stigmatize the genre and those who listen to it. Although the article was published in 2005, the search for more recent publications demonstrates that such scenery has not been altered, with a predominance of studies in the health fields.

Rafalovich and Schneider (2005) call the attention for the psychological chaos that seem to emerge from the metal music. Quoting a study from 1995, the authors connect the alleged chaos to the musical language itself. For Magadini (apud RAVALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 134),

Modern metal’s disjointed, yet precise cacophony is further illustrated by the infusion of complex rhythmic techniques that further the earlier aesthetic directions begun by bands like Metallica and Megadeth. As a continuing reflection of metal’s modeling of today’s psychological anxiety and as a sign of the genre’s increasing musical sophistication, metal bands since the early 1990s

increasingly utilize polyrhythmic techniques in their compositions. The use of polyrhythms, most notably employed in avant-garde jazz circles, involves the performance of two or more time signatures simultaneously.

The complexity of the musical language, as explained by Magadini, in hard rock, creates a pattern that, first of all, is far away the idea that, musically speaking, this kind of music is only incomprehensible noise. The musical structure is highly developed in terms of rhythm, often demanding hard work from the musicians in both composing and performing the songs, and also from the listeners to follow. Rafalovich and Schneider (2005, p. 134, author's emphasis) continue, explaining the effects of such complexity on the listeners:

A pattern emerges after the listener repeatedly hears the 'resolution point' in these time signatures. The arrival of the resolution point may be long in coming, depending on which meters are played against each other. Anticipation of the time when the meters resolve creates a state of anxiety in the listener. Such an anxiety typifies the subjective moment of the adrenaline-rush musical tapestry so commonly associated with today's metal bands and their themes of psychological confusion.

In this way, studies that take the musical language into account may explain in a more comprehensive way the relation between hard rock and aggressiveness. The expectancy for the musical resolution point, in terms of harmony and rhythm, may be related to a biological event, the adrenaline rush, that could contribute to the aggressive effect of this musical genre. As pointed up before, both hard rock and jazz are complex in their musical composition, but the effect, on the listener, according to the authors, is different in both cases. We have to remember, thought, that there are also different kinds of jazz. Rafalovich and Schneider (2005, p. 142, author's emphasis) continue:

Due to its emphasis on rhythm, rather than melody, it may be argued that the psychological tension engendered by polyrhythms are based upon sudden burst on mono-tonal, noise-gated, highly distorted, and low-tuned guitar noise that is often juxtaposed with drums played in a different meter. Played in such a manner, this type of rhythmic structure emphasizes the gaps between notes and makes for a disturbing machine-like aesthetic. Polyrhythms in jazz are based upon the same rhythmic principle, but usually employ multi-tonal melodic devices in different meters, rather than strictly rhythmic devices. The melodic emphasis of jazz largely covers gaps in the rhythmic structure. In some ways, this

makes the polyrhythms in jazz more difficult to feel. Hence, jazz is considered more 'cerebral' and metal more 'aggressive'.

So, rhythm in hard rock is basically responsible by the aggressive effect in this kind of music, aided by the unexpected effects of the instruments, like distortions. The 'noisy' and traditionally unwished for, 'dirty' sonority of the electric instruments became the rule. The illusion of the somber chaos found in the instrumentalization of the metal music, characterized by the low tuned, distorted guitars and cacophonous time-shifting instruments match the lyrical contents, which would not happen if the lyrics conveyed sunny narratives (RAFALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005).

Regarding the lyrics, for Rafalovich and Schneider, the contemporary metal groups still refer to a male aggressive world, but the explicit anti-female themes, for instance, from the 1970s and 1980s rock music are not present in contemporary metal music, which shows historical changes in youth aggressiveness. The authors point out that

[...] in a world perceived by cynical metal fans to be tainted by a rationalistic Weberian sluggishness, violence symbolizes the beauty of rapid change. In conveying the human capacity for violence, metal bands symbolize one's ability to effect immediate and visible alterations in the course of events in the world.

In a political sense, the individualistic and violent motifs in metal lyrics resonate with those portraying psychological chaos. During a time when 5-10 percent of school-age boys are taking Ritalin for behavioral problems (Breggin 1998), and when the propensity for violence and anti-institutional behavior is categorized under mental disorder labels such as Conduct Disorder and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, p. 85-94), the appeal to the virtues of violence is counter-hegemonic (RAFALOVICH; SCHNEIDER, 2005, p. 137).

The authors, thus, acknowledge aggressiveness and violence in hard rock, but offer a possible interpretation that goes beyond the worries with public health. The behavior considered deviant, undesirable, conveyed both by the lyrics and musicality of hard rock do not constitute mere social inadequacies, or pathologies. They are responses to the society constraints and they change according to time and space, denoting movement. And movement, desire for change is, as a rule, a basic characteristic of young people. Anguish, together with aggressiveness, may be reactions when the individual does not know what to do in situations in which s/he is forced to take decisions but does not feel prepared for.

Rock'n Roll and a multimodal reading

In the book *Running with the Devil. Power, gender and madness in heavy metal music*, published in the USA in 1993, Robert Walser develops what some critics consider one of the first and most important academic studies on heavy metal. Amongst several aspects discussed by Walser, his analysis of the discourse of the popular music is relevant for this paper. For the author, an analysis of this musical genre must go beyond the vocals, and he applies the Bakhtinian concepts of 'horizons of expectations' and 'heteroglossia', besides Todorov's literary criticism, to explain the fluidity of the musical genre in relation to the musical language itself. In an apparently paradoxical, but curious approach, Walser applies theories on verbal discourse to discuss the musical discourse, stressing the need to consider music as a language itself. The author reinforces that

[...] like genres and discourses, musical meanings are contingent but never arbitrary. There is never any 'essential' correspondence between particular music signs or processes and specific social meanings, yet such signs and processes would never circulate if they did not produce such meanings. Musical meanings are always grounded socially and historically, and they operate on an ideological field of conflicting interests, institutions, and memories (WALSER, 1993, p. 6, author's emphasis).

In this way, we could suggest that the data that point at deviant behavior related to hard rock cannot be analyzed solely from a biological point of view, as if the sound vibrations would be hazardous for the listeners, not even from the point of view of the lyrics by themselves, as if their themes would lead the youth to such 'deviant behavior'. For Walser (1993, p. 8),

[...] rock songs, like all discourse, do have meanings that can be discovered through analysis of their form and structure, but such analysis is useful only if it is grounded culturally and historically and if it acknowledges its interests forthrightly.

Walser's considerations anchor the proposal that rock'n roll, as a cultural movement, may be approached in schools from the perspective of multiliteracies, since its productions convey important meanings through verbal language as well as other modes of language, as music.

Although we do not intend to develop further the analysis on the musical language, for the sake of the perspective of multiliteracies it is important to note the association Walser, quoting Fiske and

Hartley, makes between oral and literate modes, as indicated in the Table 1 below:

Table 1. Oral and literate modes.

Oral Modes	Literate Modes
dramatic	Narrative
episodic	Sequential
mosaic	Linear
dynamic	Static
Active	Artifact
concrete	Abstract
ephemeral	Permanent
Social	Individual
Metaphorical	Metonymic
Rhetorical	Logical
Dialectical	Univocal/ 'consistent'

Source: Walser (1993, p. 21).

For Walser, there is a clear correspondence between music as discourse in the first column and the lyrics and their criticism in the second. Music as language itself becomes undervalued when the focus of its criticism enlightens only the lyrics. Such lyrics, by the way, are misinterpreted when literary devices, as irony, are not noticed. As an example, we can take the song 'Master of Puppets', by the band Metallica (USA).

Title track of the album recorded in 1986, *Master of Puppets* is considered by critics, and probably also by the Metallica fans, their best work. In a world tour with the show Metallica on Demand, in 2013 and 2014, the band asks the fans who have bought tickets for this particular show to choose the songs they would like to listen to. The fans choose seventeen songs in the internet, from a repertoire of 140, the band chooses one from their new album, and, at the ending of the show, before the final encore, the musicians play one of the three first songs that were out of the list of the fans. During the show, the fans can send MSN messages to indicate which song from the three they prefer. In this way, Metallica brings interactivity to their show to a level that surprises the fans of trash metal, a very aggressive rock trend. 'Master of Puppets' is on the top of the list of hits chosen by the fans in places as diverse as Bogota, Horsens, Nuremberg, Rome, Varsovia and São Paulo.

The 1986 album cover shows almost transparent strings, coming out of the word Metallica on the top of the image, linking it to white crosses of a cemetery that occupy all the inferior position of the layer. 'Master of Puppets' may be 'read' as a song about destructive effects of any oppressive system, through, for instance, the verses 'I'm your source of self-destruction' and 'Leading on your death's construction'. However, drugs, in special cocaine, become clear as the kernel of the opposition

construction/destruction, leading to the construction of the destruction that is death, especially in the following verses¹:

Needlework the way, never you betray
Life of death becoming clearer
Pain monopoly, ritual misery
Chop your breakfast on a mirror

Here, the reference is clear to the mode of consumption of cocaine, and to its destructive effects. Nobody could affirm that the band is encouraging the consumption of the drug when the vocalist James Hetfield screams, followed by the power of the electric instruments in a firm and paused rhythm:

Come crawling faster
Obey your master
Your life burns faster
Obey your master
Master

The irony in the lyrics is stressed by the rhythmic insistence on the words in the refrain, by the high speed as theme in the rime 'master / faster', with pauses after 'Master', calling the attention to the one who controls the strings of life that lead quickly to death, to destruction. There is a contrast with the other verses of the song, longer in the vocals, but also with ultra-speeded execution by the instruments.

The 1980s, however, was still involved by an aura of enchantment with the consumption of hallucinogens and such practice, as well the excessive consumption of alcohol, by the band members, was not a secret for the fans that, on their turn, would share the same life style and social behavior. The musical, literary, social and historical context of the production and circulation of this song is highly complex. We could question, thus, if for the crowds of people that have already heard 'Master of Puppets' with the attention dispensed by a fan, repeating its lyrics, the song may have caused any reaction regarding the consumption of hallucinogens, either encouraging the action or preventing it. Why are the reasons for the success of this song as the preferred one by the fans, up to today? Metallica still brings their fans to stadiums all over the world, with sold-out tickets (in São Paulo, the Metallica on Demand show had a public of 65 thousand people, in March 2014). What is the context for the reception of the irony in the song for the contemporary public? What 'speaks' louder in the impressive popular appeal of the song, the powerful lyrics or the aggressiveness of the musical

language and the band visual? As additional information, in São Paulo the band played under rain, completely wet, without showing any sign of disturbance by the situation. Undoubtedly, that is an example of the 'rock'n roll attitude' that seeks for movement no matter the difficulties faced. The discussion of such aspects in schools, with teenagers, may contribute to critical literacies through a cultural practice closely related to the English language that reverberates on the youth culture all over the world, Brazil included.

The destructive appetite of Guns n' Roses: an example of a multimodal approach

Walser concludes his book on heavy metal with a sub-chapter dedicated to Axl Rose, the vocalist, main song writer and leader of the band Guns N' Roses (USA). Formed in Hollywood in 1985, the band is currently in activity with the same name, but only Axl Rose was a member of its initial formation. The history of the band formation is completely inserted in the group of apparently inappropriate subjects for teenagers. Initially, the group had Axl Rose in the vocals and main lyricist, Slash and Izzy Stradlin as guitar players, Duff McKagan as bassist, and Steven Adler in the drums. After some initial difficulties to launch the song 'Welcome to the Jungle' as a single and the album *Appetite for Destruction* (1987), the success of the band was meteoric. The album brings tracks that became hits, as 'Welcome to the Jungle', 'Nightrain', 'Mr. Brownstone', 'Paradise City' and 'Sweet Child o' Mine'. *Each one of these* songs would deserve an analysis, but here we will stick to the ones that, in a certain way, refer to the themes of aggressiveness, drugs and alcoholism. All the lyrics quoted here are part of the booklet of the album *Appetite for Destruction* (1987).

In 'Welcome to the Jungle', Guns n' Roses (1987) tells that a successful life in big cities is under reach for just a few and strong ones, mainly the ones with money. In the first stanza, Rose screams:

Welcome to the jungle
We got fun 'n' games
We got everything you want
Honey we know the names
We are the people that can find
Whatever you may need
If you got the money honey
We got your disease

The videoclip of the song shows a quite naïve Axl, getting out a bus in a big city, carrying an enormous suitcase, wearing checkered shirt and chewing a grass leave, stereotype of the countryside man that comes to urban centers looking for better levels of life. The following scenes illustrate the

¹ Lyrics from the booklet of the album *Master of Puppets* (1986).

scenery the lyrics affirm the character will find. At the same time, the videoclip also shows images of Axl as the vocalist, with his aggressive style, the slitter movements that became one of his marks, the voice shouted in more sharp and aggressive notes. It seems that the vocalist, more experienced, is telling the character what awaits him. It is well known that members of Guns 'N' Roses were involved with small theft, consumption and dealing of drugs, and prostitution in the beginning of the group's career.

The following track, 'It's so easy' shows how the life of the ones who were already able to domesticate the jungle may be easy: "It's so easy, easy / When everybody's trying to please me, baby". 'Nightrain', one of the hits of the band, is a song in a frenetic rhythm that seems to incite movement. The song passes on, through the means of transportation, the idea of high speed. The lyrics establish it from the beginning:

Loaded like a freight train
Flyin' like an aeroplane
Feeling like a space brain
One more time tonight
[...]
Nightrain
Bottoms up
I'm on the nightrain
Whoa yeah
I'm on the nightrain
Love that stuff
I'm on the nightrain
I guess
I guess, I guess, I guess I never learn

Following the song, one can notice that it does not portrait only the means of transportation. 'Nightrain' was the brand of a cheap wine the members of the band used to drink while composing in a rented garage, in the beginning of their career (McKAGAN, 2011). The nice sensations of the beverage appear in the lyrics, reinforced by the quick rhythm and by Slash's fast guitar, following Axl's high notes, conferring a highly playful, joyful mode to the song. One cannot say that there is a single mention to the dangerous effects of the excess of alcohol consumption. The ethylic trip transports all in a highly pleasurable way.

In 'Mr. Brownstone', it is the heroin addiction that inspires the song, since brownstone is a well known slang for this kind of drug. Composed by Slash and Izzy, the lyrics show the change of habits while the drug dependency is being installed:

I get up around seven
Get outta bed around nine
And I don't worry about nothin' no
Cause worryin's a waste of my... time

Show usually starts around seven
We go on stage around nine
Get on the bus about eleven

Sippin' a drink and feelin' fine

The beginning of the song tells about the routine of the band, getting up, preparing for the show, in a light way, with no worries, and drinking. The sequence of hours show some lethargy in following the appointments, since they get up two hours after waking up and get on stage also two hours after it should have started. The refrain, next, gives and explanation for such easy flow:

We've been dancin' with
Mr. Brownstone
He's been knockin'
He won't leave me alone
No, no, no
He won't leave me alone

Mr. Brownstone is the company they keep and that, at the same time, prevents loneliness and refuses to leave, becoming inconvenient. The next stanza shows dependency:

I used to do a little
But a little wouldn't do
So the little got more and more
I just keep tryin'
To get a little better
Said a little better than before
I used to do a little
But a little wouldn't do
So the little got more and more
I just keep tryin'
To get a little better
Said a little better than before

The quick rhythm of the song, and the repetition of words and sounds (the letters 't', 'b', and 'l') give a feeling of dizziness while dependency is installed. The following verses after the refrain signal to an attempt to abandon Mr. Brownstone, leaving the old man behind:

Now I get up around whenever
I used to get up on time
But that old man
He's a real muthafucker
Gonna kick him on down the line

The song repeats the second stanza, reinforcing the idea that dependency is a fact and that Mr Brownstone is controlling the situation. The last stanza makes clear the attitude that should be taken:

Stuck it in the middle
And then I shot it in the middle
And then it
It threw me out of the line

I should have known better
Said I wish I'd never met'im
Said I leave it all
Behind, yowsa!

Although the intention was to kick Mr Brownstone out of the line, it is clear that he is the one who kicks, and it would have been better not to have met him at all.

The lyrics, like in 'The Master of Puppets', although refer clearly to drug dependency, do not encourage the habit. The musical language, however, is much different from Metallica's song. While 'The Master of Puppets' is powerful, violent, even dramatic, 'Mr Brownstone' is playful, joyful, quick in a different sense. The melodic line is more present and the drums are not so heavy as in the other song. The band seems to be having a good time, although they are aware of the risks they are running. Although the awareness of dependency was already present in *Appetite for Destruction*, the career of the band was marked, besides success, at that time, by crowds of fans enraged due to the frequent delays in the beginning of the shows, Axl's attitudes of fury and arrogance on and out the stage, ending up with episodes of violence with destruction and eventually death in the public. This entire context rendered to the band the title of 'The Most Dangerous Band in the World'.

In 1990, the drummer Steve Adler is dismissed of the band by his colleagues for his drug addiction was been interfering with his performance. In 1992, Adler prosecutes the band for having inducted him to the vice. In 1996, he goes through a CVA as a consequence of the drug addiction and his speech is damaged. The drummer continues his career with other bands, and goes through periods of rehabilitation in 2006 and 2013.

The guitar player Izzy Stradlin, involved with consumption and selling of drugs since the group started living together, decides to abandon the drugs in 1989. Since then, he diminishes his participation in the band and leaves Guns N' Roses in 1991. The band's lifestyle, it seems, was not compatible with his new sober condition.

The guitar player Slash and the bassist Duff McKagan's relation to drugs deserve special attention. As Adler, Slash and Duff almost died as consequence of drug consumption. After their health problems, they decided to abandon the vice. Duff had a pancreatitis in 1993 and Slash, a heart disease in 2001. Slash leaves Guns in 1996 and Duff, in 1997. The three of them told their experiences in biographies: in 2007, Slash publishes *Slash*, an autobiography written with Anthony Bozza; in 2010, with Laurence J.

Spagnola, Adler tells his version in *My Appetite for Destruction*. Sex, Drugs and Guns N' Roses; in 2011 it is Duff's turn to publish *It's so Easy and Other Lies*. Celebrities' autobiographies are quite common, usually told by them to ghost writers or journalists, eventually becoming bestsellers. In this case, Duff's version is the only one written by himself. In the title, the author makes an ironic reference to the song from 'Appetite for Destruction' that celebrates the easy life of flattery. Duff makes clear, right in the beginning of the book, that this is his version of the facts, and that his friends would, probably tell different stories. The musician tells, for instance, how he felt when Axl, during a show, announced to the public that that one would probably be the last presentation of the band if its members did not stop 'dancing with Mr. Brownstone' so frequently. Duff also tells that Axl's lawyers convinced him and Slash to transfer to Axl the legal rights of the band's name, since the two of them would probably die of drug abuse and the situation could bring problems to the group (McKAGAN, 2011).

Duff's biography is not only made of the retelling of the ruin caused in his life by the drugs and alcohol addiction. His determination in keeping sober is told through his difficulties and daily battles, failures and restarting that have marked his process of rehabilitation. Writing and returning to the studies he had abandoned at high school—a rule among rock stars—constitute, according to Duff, an important part in his recuperation. He returns, according to his narrative, to some habits and values abandoned during adolescence, always lightened by the strong presence of his mother and his determination of not hurting her. According to Duff, it is the perspective of the pain that he would bring to her that makes him giving up suicide. The book is dedicated to his mother, and his second daughter has her name.

The book starts with his elder daughter's thirteen-birthday party. The narrative is intermingled with his reminiscences of what he was doing at the same age, thus revealing his worries about his two daughters and the need, as any father, to protect them from all danger, drugs included. There is a flash back in the narrative, and the author tells about his relationship with the band and, eventually, the drug addiction and alcoholism, his almost nearly death in 1994 and his recuperation. Duff retells, in his book, how drugs and alcohol had taken control of his life, and

describes the death of people nearby, including the suicide of Kurt Cobain, the guitar player and lead singer of the band Nirvana in 1994 in Seattle, Duff's place (McKAGAN, 2011).

During his recovery, Duff rediscovers the literature he had abandoned in high school:

Mornings I was still panic-ridden. I felt myself gasping for air after what seemed like an eternity dunked underneath a thick green film of pound muck. I was sober, but thirsty. My mind had almost atrophied from lack of stimulation. Now that my life had taken a turn for the better, I felt that I needed to read. I wanted to experience the things I had missed out on, all of the books high schoolers were required to read. It's not as if I was nostalgic for the days of high school, but I was curious. F. Scott Fitzgerald? Shakespeare? Melville? Where do I start? Fiction, nonfiction? (McKAGAN, 2011, p. 2).

Duff's choice is Hemingway, and the musician finds a common point with the writer:

When I happened upon a book by Ernest Hemingway set during the Spanish Civil War, it dawned on me that I had yet to delve into my initial plan: to plow through some of that required reading. For me, that book, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, was the one that suddenly unlocked the world of literature. Hemingway's descriptions blew me away. They were sparse but beautiful. When he wrote of hunger and pain, I felt sudden pangs of soreness and dread. And when one of his characters talked about alcohol addiction, I cringed: "Of all men the drunkard is the foulest. The thief when he is not stealing is like another. The extortioner does not practice in the home. The murderer when he is at home can wash his hands. But the drunkard stinks and vomits in his own bed and dissolves his organs in alcohol (McKAGAN, 2011, p. 3, author's quotation).

That is the theme of Duff's book: human degradation through drug addiction and alcoholism, or the hell he says to have gone through. The lack of memory and of control of his acts, besides physical horrors, like vomiting and bleeding, are clearly described, but not in a weepy, sappy way. Duff, the writer, has a concise style, with short sentences, alternating longer narrative paragraphs with shorter, more emphatic ones. Perhaps, some influence of the Hemingway he has just discovered. Sometimes, he develops a subtle humor, together with a vocabulary peppered with some 'dirty' words, the only habit that Duff affirms to have maintained from the old times. Probably a sweeter, over-elaborated style would not match the punk rock bassist. In his book, Duff also mentions the difficulties in relearning how to write, as well as how to breathe, feed or exercise. Besides writing, he enrolls for a Business course at the Seattle

University, completed on line due to the tours. He publishes articles regularly in sites as Playboy.com, ESPN.com and Seattleweekly.com. His articles about music and varieties present daily issues, as the concerns of a father, apparently dissonant with the life style he had adopted in the 1990s and the beginning of the 2000s. The life free from vice is also translated into, sometimes, a quieter, more melodic music. Nowadays, Duff takes part in the band Walking Papers from Seattle, formed in 2012, playing hard rock and blues.

Of course, the narrative of the rock star (he says he does not like the term) cannot be taken as undeniable truth; Duff himself affirms that he does not remember several of the facts he went through. What really matters here is the construction of this character that fights to get rid of drug addiction and alcoholism, inserted into a historical and cultural context that may be interesting for the identity formation of teenagers, readers and listeners that go through similar situations.

Slash's music, in his turn, also portrays his life with no drugs. The song 'Not for me', from the album *Apocalyptic Love* (2012), could be considered an answer to 'Mr. Brownstone'. All the lyrics quoted here come from the booklet of the album *Apocalyptic Love* (2012). In the lyrics, Slash affirms in the refrain repeated in the voice of Myles Kennedy, in an acoustic version with Slash, Myles Kennedy and the band The Conspirators.

This life is not for me
[...]
Anymore

The song, very melodic, has the electric guitar and the bass played in a much calmer way, and an almost inaudible drum set for rock standards, ended up with one of Slash's solos, followed up by Myles insistently repeating the refrain, as reaffirming the decision taken. The lyrics demonstrate the determination of keeping away from drugs, despite the menace of relapse:

The devil smiles and laughs at me,
Says you'll be back, just wait and see,
You know I've heard this all before,
And I say,
You can keep your high life in the hills,
Your cocaine lies and whiskey thrills,
I don't need you anymore.

As Duff says in one of his articles, 'How to say no to drugs (Even when you are unzipped)', rock'n roll has deserved its negative fame:

Rock'n roll definitely has the stereotype of being connected to drug use. I get it. The cliché has been

earned. But in our modern era, it seems like drugs have finally lost the status of being a mystical and romantic part of the rock persona. Maybe we've seen too many people implode, with public meltdowns, and worst of all, death (McKAGAN, 2012).

Images of the public meltdowns Duff refers to are available to any person that feels like watching them at internet. Those images show interviews with the band members in the 1990's clearly drunk and dizzy by drugs, sometimes committing mistakes during presentations. At the same time, the energy of the songs, through the instruments and visual of the band can also be felt by those who are willing to watch the videos or listen to their albums. The public image of those people, and characters at the same time, reflect the wishes and uncertainties of lots of young people who embrace such means of expression.

Final considerations

Hard rock may be, thus, a valid way to discuss specific problems of young people and, at the same time, of the pop culture in English, in high schools. Bands like Metallica and Guns N' Roses started their careers with their members just out of adolescence, with their typical conflicts. Those boys abandoned education during high school, an attitude that many youngsters wish to take, others are forced to take, and dedicated themselves to their dreams fiercely, facing pre-established models. They have looked for a means of expression different from those normally taught at schools and reached success, generally speaking, in pursuing their objectives. Here, schools could think about to which extent they are offering alternatives for expression other than those defined as desirable to students. It is clear that those young people had a purpose in their lives, and this can be a 'positive' aspect of all the process, although it is not the aim of this paper to present any suggestion of ideal behavior for teenage students. Those musicians were inserted in a specific historical and cultural context that favored certain choices. Some of them regretted the roads taken, others did not have time for that. As most young people, they faced difficulties and expressed them through their music. They were part of a context in which drugs and alcohol were glamorous. Some of them died, others could establish a way of life that matches their initial plans, others are still trying. Nowadays, despite all information available about the vicious consequences of drug addiction and alcohol abuse, artists still die of drug overdoses and

youngsters follow the same path. Violent situations are, all over the world, strongly connected to drug and alcohol abuse.

Exposing teenagers to such a rich cultural movement like rock'n roll, that deals with their anguish, through multiliteracies, may be a valid way to offer them possibilities of self-knowledge and choices. The stories developed by those characters' lives, now in their fifties, and the cultural movement they have created, are evidences that there are several possibilities of languages. Looking critically at those possibilities, one could assume, their consequences could be better administered. A perspective in multiliteracy, thus, implies looking at different languages, and consequently a team work at school, with teachers from different areas (literature, language, music, arts and history) working together could bring better results.

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