



The Builder Inquires the Bricks: A Study of Roger Waters' The Wall from the Viewpoint of Jean Francois Lyotard's Paralogy

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Abstract

The focus of the present study was on paralogical potential of the lyrics. For this reason, four tracks from *The Wall*, which focuses on the alienation and self-captivation of its main character, Pink, because of his nervous breakdown caused by family, school, and society, were analyzed with emphasis on the dialogic/paralogical elements within the album. "Mother", "Hey You", "Comfortably Numb", and "The Trial" were studied separately. After a precise discussion and inspection, it was shown that Pink, as the main character (voice) in each of these tracks, allows the other voices (hierarchies) to have their say, and thus the continuous paralogy shows itself in the theatre of his mind. As a result, the only way is an ongoing conflict in which all the voices get a chance to speak out, not the deletion and elimination of any of them. Consensus leads to the annihilation of either one side or both/all sides. Therefore, the solution is an unsolvable Babel of conflict with the involvement of different language games (different trends of life).

Keywords: paralogy, *The Wall*, Roger Waters, language games, polyphony, dialogism

1. Introduction and Theoretical Background

Mikhail Bakhtin chose the novel genre for analysis. The novel, as he perceived, and with great focus on those written by Dostoevsky, is a genre which allows a multitude of voices to speak for themselves. The polyphony or heteroglossia of this genre finds its origin in the carnivals held in the middle ages where the lower classes mocked and humiliated the supreme leaders of the town. Bakhtin would refer to the effect of this reverse of hierarchies as parody. On the other hand, the epic, an autocratic genre, serves as a monolingual genre in which the other is silenced and never given the chance to speak.

Bakhtin's notion of polyphony can be compared with what Jean Francois Lyotard introduces as incommensurability. Sidorkin states that "Bakhtin's idea of polyphonic truth addresses Lyotard's problem of incommensurability of language games" (86). Sidorkin has found some relevance between Bakhtin, Lyotard, and Wittgenstein (by mentioning language games). Brügger, drawing a link between Lyotard and Wittgenstein claims that the former "starts with the idea that language ought to be conceived as a series of *different* and *incommensurable* language games" (79). Incommensurability, according to Lyotard, is a state in which all language games or voices coexist but never come to reconciliation. In other words, there is a perpetual conflict between the components that can never be resolved. Sidorkin alludes to "Bakhtin's concern for diversity", and for this reason posits him next to Lyotard and among postmodernists (88).



Ludwig Wittgenstein was an Austrian thinker who spent most of his scholarly life working on language. His main contribution to the world of humanities was *Philosophical Investigations* in which he created his challenging and dialectical ideas about language and language games. His celebrated books contain a confusing mixture of language and philosophy. After Ferdinand de Saussure, he is considered the one thinker thoroughly affecting poststructural and postmodern theorists such as Derrida and Lyotard. Wittgenstein's influence on Lyotard can be seen in such books as *The Postmodern Condition* and *The Differend*.

Language, a phenomenon as old as human existence, has had different roles in the thoughts of different linguists. Wittgenstein emphasizes the social and cultural aspects of language, and for him communication embodies a rather intricate phenomenon. "[T]o imagine a language", he asserts, "means to imagine a form of life" (8). Eagleton, in his essay "Wittgenstein's Friends", elaborates on Wittgenstein's interpretation of language as a link between "discourse" and materiality, and therefore, concludes that the connection "between discourse and forms of life is necessary, not contingent; for Wittgenstein the language of sensation in particular would be incomprehensible if it were not closely bound up with actual behavior" (70). Wittgenstein was the pioneer to introduce the term "language games" into linguistics. His definition of the term is so much in relation with his treatment of "language". He believes that a "language game" is supposed to "bring into prominence the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity or of a form of life" (11).

One of the terms introduced by Lyotard is "the differend" in a book with the same title. He defines "the differend" as "a case of conflict, between (at least) two parties, that cannot be equitably resolved for lack of a rule of judgment applicable to both arguments" (*The Differend* xi). Trying to resolve their state of differend with only one rule would ruin at least one of the sides and even both the sides if they do not agree with the law. So, that is why they are in a permanent unsolvable situation. According to Yancy, "Lyotard's paralogy allows for the proliferation of a diversity of voices, realities, and justices, not a single metavoiced dictating the nature and limits of 'Value,' 'Reality' and 'The Good'" (573). The ideas or ideologies that made an effort to settle the differends and paralogies in history are called grand narratives. They do not really try to settle a complicated situation, but to take sides with one of the parties. Lyotard distinguishes the term from "litigation". Connor believes that the differend occurs "When conflict between two parties, or their genres of discourse, is resolved by recourse to a third genre of discourse which is held to be applicable to both parties" (38).

A great bulk of Western theory after the Second World War has been focused on the inclusion of the Other. Bakhtin, however living before World War II, is not an exception, for the clash between including and excluding the Other goes back to Machiavelli, and even before that, to Plato. But the consequences of the war created an atmosphere of change throughout Europe. Lyotard too believes that the silenced must have a say, and his notion of the differend, which focuses on the Holocaust and Auschwitz, alongside his idea of paralogy, make up a theoretical construction which inserts the Other in the ongoing cultural and political discourse.

All three thinkers, however, share slight similarities in giving back the privilege to the Other. Polyphony, paralogy, the differend, and language games leave room for a component that has been silenced before. They open the doors of dialogism, no matter what the consequences. Once the atmosphere of dialogue has been created, every member will receive a right to speak out.

In *The Postmodern Condition*, Lyotard introduces a familiar term with regard to scientific legitimation and governmental actions. His idea of terrorism carries the most vital theoretical assumptions that shape his socio-political thought. Terrorism, in his view, shares affinities with his notions of paralogy, the differend, language games, and also the grand narrative - little narrative interrelation.

"By terror", Lyotard means "the efficiency gained by eliminating, or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him. He is silenced or consents, not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened (there are many ways to prevent someone from playing). The decision makers' arrogance, which in principle has no equivalent in the sciences, consists in the exercise of terror" (63-64). Apparently, the incommensurability that shows itself in human relations can only be solved when one side attempts to eradicate the other. The process of eradication can unveil itself in different ways. One can destroy the other physically in order to make him/her a slave, a follower, an inferior, or a subordinate. One other way to get rid of the other is to make him/her believe ideologically in what you say and how you act in order to make him obedient. Thus, the individuality of the other will be taken away, and s/he will give in to the superior. A force is needed to gain this dominance (hegemony), the effectiveness of which Lyotard believes "is based entirely on the threat to eliminate the opposing player, not on making a better "move" than he" (46).



By referring to language games, Lyotard prepares the scene as a playground in which many players are waiting their turn. There is a game with various accepted rules and regulations to be played. One group has to cast its leadership over the other by certain legitimate moves. Once a group cannot find a way to play legitimately, it manipulates illegitimate "terrorizing" methods in order to survive. As Keane explains, "ideological language games are those which demand their *general* adoption and, therefore, the exclusion and/or repression (the 'terrorizing', as Lyotard would say) of every other *particular* language game" (89). Here, institutions such as school, family, and media (Ideological State Apparatuses) serve as particular language games that threaten the individuality and subjectivity of an Other who seeks to take part in the game with recourse to the regulations. The result of such clashes will be non-conformist, anarchistic, and rebellious actions on the part of the repressed.

Terrorism, as Lyotard believes, is a consequence of consensus. For in consensus, a group "agrees" to be repressed. The agreement made here is a move that paves the way for the hegemony of one group over another. Great terrorist acts, Readings claims, "have been committed not simply in the name of but *as a result of* the presumption of a common, abstract, universal humanity" (176). The so-called humanitarian trends of emancipation that have ensnared the world since the Enlightenment are starting points for Lyotard in order to criticize and attack such thinkers as Habermas who still believe in emancipation through consensus. When an organization or a person feels the right to do the thinking for others, and to pre-digest an ideology for the masses, the result will be totalitarian terrorism. Nuyen, having Lyotard's concept of justice in mind, states that "[t]errorism is unjust because it prevents others from playing their games" (101).

2. Roger Waters and *The Wall*

The Pink Floyd, a British Rock band, was founded by Syd Barrett in 1966. Other members were Roger Waters, Richard Wright and Nick Mason. Later on when "Barrett's behaviour became increasingly erratic and the other members of the band decided to part company with him" (Hardy & Laing 269), David Gilmour was brought in as a lead guitarist and vocalist. The band's most important and influential albums include *The Dark Side of the Moon* (1973), *Wish You Were Here* (1975), *Animals* (1977), *The Wall* (1979) and *The Final Cut* (1983).

The Wall consists of two sides, with 13 tracks on each, which, on the whole, makes it 26 tracks. The lyrics are written by Roger Waters who left the band after *The Final Cut*. *The Wall* tells the story of a young rock star called Pink who gradually builds a conceptual wall around himself in order to negate his surroundings. This album can be seen as Waters' self-depiction. Manning touches upon Waters' spitting in a fan's face and consequently dividing himself from Pink Floyd's "coolly English – indeed, phlegmatic – detachment from messy emotional display" (170).

After the universal success of the album, Waters decided to create a motion picture out of *The Wall*. Therefore, he provided a script and started searching for a director. He was introduced to Alan Parker, and finally they agreed to go to an animator. They hired Gerald Scarfe to work out the exotic and surrealistic cartoons for the film. "Scarfe's primary contributions" according to Manning "were a lyrical World War II animated sequence for 'Goodbye Blue Sky' and the grotesques of 'The Trial'" (118). After Parker decided to direct the cinematic project he was astonished by the strange grotesques of Scarfe's animations (Ibid).

Waters himself was chosen to take Pink's role in the film, but later on it was decided not to give him the part. Punk artist Bob Geldof was selected for the role, but his first reaction to the proposal was "I hate Pink Floyd". Later, he agreed to take the part.

Afterwards Waters decided to record a new arrangement of the songs within the album in order to be used in the film. Manning states that:

When it came to the soundtrack, Waters was left alone to tweak various songs for the film. Parker agreed to add 'When the Tigers...', a solo Waters performance, alongside Michael Kamen's orchestrations and the Pontardulais Male Voice Choir as an overture to the film (120).

The film received international attention and it cast a huge shadow over each and every move of the band members, especially Waters. The Nazi imagery, the hammers, and the bricks came to represent a rebellious universal aggression towards conformity.

This paper aims to study Roger Waters' lyrics for *The Wall* in the light of Jean Francois Lyotard's theoretical jargon. Therefore, concepts such as paralogy, and the differend will be applied to the lyrics with relation to various concepts by other theorists like Bakhtin (polyphony, dialogism) and Wittgenstein (language games)



3. Analysis

3.1 The tracks to be analyzed

The Wall, in its overall form, embodies a dialogic nature. It paves the way for a variety of characters, thoughts and ideologies to speak themselves out. Therefore, it gives way to a parodic tone in which the characters who are higher in rank find themselves satirized by those lower in rank. If we take both metanarratives and little narratives as totally diverse language games, then we will have a dialogue going on between these language games. This Bakhtinian hierarchical atmosphere constitutes *The Wall*. Pink is a suppressed and subverted person whose voice does not reach the higher ranks. That is why he is destined to build a wall and bound himself. One can take this act of wall building as a mental performance which Pink has managed in order to tear down the hierarchies. Therefore, the whole thing is a game of languages, that is, a game in which conventional and standardized ways of life are warring against anarchic ones. The director of the carnival is Pink. His memory is constantly at work. He edits the motion picture going on in his mind. All flashbacks and flash forwards are made by his imagination. He is the one who has prepared the exotic cartoons of those higher ranks. He has done a deliberate job. His mental conflict leads him towards creating a new universe where he, as the subverted, gets the chance to subvert the whole traditional life behind him. Thus the undermined becomes the underminer. This is how Pink's language game works: dialogue, parody, and subversion.

To put this in Lyotard's terminology, there is a conflict at work between these language games which cannot be resolved, for there is no universal rule which can be applied to both parties. This situation gives way to a paralogical encounter with the problem. Instead of a harmonic consensus in which one has to sacrifice his/her ideas, parody welcomes diverse, or let's say disharmonic, ideas to have a say. Pink is on one side of this paralogical mental theatre, while the higher ranks are on the other. He has found the opportunity to destabilize the hierarchies and become the highest rank, however the performance takes part merely in his mind. It is time for Pink's soft revenge. It is time for everybody to understand that he has been silenced for such a long time. It looks as though all the actors of his scenario have also been invited to see his show in the flesh. The show must go on.

However the totality of *The Wall* is dialogic in structure, some of the songs, in themselves and by themselves, also reflect such a structure even if they are separated from the whole album. The lyrics to these songs are written in such a way that an observer can straightforwardly pinpoint the dialogic nature. "Mother", "Hey You", "Comfortably Numb", and "The Trial" contain lyrics which manifestly demonstrate the paralogical conflict between two parties.

3.2 Paralogy in "Mother"

"Mother" is a great example of paralogical parody. Pink asks his mother many strange questions. These questions create an atmosphere in which Pink reverses the roles. He becomes the inquisitor, and the answers are prepared in a way to betray his mother. Pink asks:

Mother do you think they'll drop the bomb?
Mother do you think they'll like this song?
Mother do you think they'll try to break my balls?
Mother should I build the wall?

The mother gives nightmarish answers to these questions, and thus Pink prepares the audience's minds with his own judgment about the whole situation. All of this dialogic conspiracy is to show that Pink's mother is to blame. This is how the above questions are answered:

Hush now baby, baby, don't you cry.
Mother's gonna make all your nightmares come true.
Mother's gonna put all her fears into you...
Ooooh baby ooooh baby ooooh baby,
Of course mama'll help to build the wall.

The even more peculiar thing about the mother's answers is that the song is sung to a lullaby tune. This exacerbates the parodic nature of the song. The mother is lulling the baby with frightening answers. She is simultaneously soothing and terrifying the baby. To use Lyotard's terminology, the mother is taking up a calming form in order to terrorize Pink, to silence him, to hush him. The essence of the mother's lullaby is a clear representation of terror and repression. Of course, one should not turn a blind eye toward the eccentric questions asked by Pink as a child. Pink intensifies the paralogical situation between him and his mother by adding color to the conflict. By his act of reversal, by showing the differences, Pink finds a chance to reveal the differend. He, as a person who has been



subverted for many years, now finds the opportunity to parody those who had oppressed his ideas and behaviors for too long. Bakhtin's act of parody takes part in a carnival, and Pink's parade is carnivalized in his mind. By the way, the mother is found guilty for helping Pink build his wall. She has guided him towards his state of alienation and self-annihilation. In the end, Pink poses his final question:

Mother, did it need to be so high?

Mother has nothing to say in return, or it might be better to say that Pink ends up his mother's part in the carnival and cuts her dialogue to accommodate with his mental opera.

3.3 *The different voices in "Hey You"*

"Hey You" combines two different voices, two different ways of narration. Pink keeps calling on those who are out beyond the wall in order to get an answer. Here, he seems to have become experienced by alienating himself from the outside world; therefore, after bidding farewell to his surroundings in "Goodbye Cruel World", he starts uttering didactic proclamations:

Hey you, don't help them to bury the light
Don't give in without a fight.

This didactic attitude coalesces with Pink's calling for help. He is completely captivated now. He desperately wants others to help him carry the stone. Pink is another Sisyphus whose cry for help remains unanswered:

Hey you, standing in the road
Always doing what you're told,
Can you help me?
Hey you, out there beyond the wall,
Breaking bottles in the hall,
Can you help me?

But this state of self-alienation and captivation leads Pink towards a kind of consciousness where he starts to blame himself as well. He accepts his own role in the breakdown he has undergone. Pink is struggling in vain, for if we go back to the beginning sequence of the film where there are many closed hotel rooms on both sides of the hall, we will come to realize that all the people to whom Pink is calling for help are themselves trapped behind their own walls. They might also be calling for help, and one of their addressees might be Pink himself. This vicious circle surrounds the lyrics and the film. By admitting that he himself is a brick in the wall, he makes an alarming conclusion:

Hey you, don't tell me there's no hope at all
Together we stand, divided we fall.

There is a different way of treating the narrativity in "Hey You". The ambivalence of the voices is shown in Pink's narration together with an omniscient narrator's words interceding to comment on the rest of the story. The narrator acts as a mediating voice which increases the possibilities of narration. Waters introduces a narrator into the song in order to familiarize the audience with what is going on in Pink's mind. This is his technique of putting different voices next to each other to amplify the paralogy. The narrator summarizes Pink's mental situation:

But it was only fantasy.
The wall was too high,
As you can see.
No matter how he tried,
He could not break free.
And the worms ate into his brain.

The narrator emphasizes Pink's desperation by clarifying that the wall was too high that the ones outside could not hear. Pink was searching for a way to get rid of the worms who had affected the whole course of his life, but, even here behind the wall, according to the narrator, he is not secure. The worms have followed him like the memories which find themselves internalized in a person's mind and cannot be taken away.

"Hey You" lets both the narrator and the main character speak themselves out. It is better to say that the narrator, not necessarily Waters, prepares a ground for Pink to directly pronounce his thoughts and ideas, and later on, s/he gives his/her own account of the whole story. Of course, after the narrator has intervened, we hear Pink again calling for help and shouting out to those outside the wall.



3.4 "Comfortably Numb" and heteroglossia

"Comfortably Numb" contains a complicated dialogic structure in which Pink is in deep hallucination and the Doctor is trying to make him ready for the show. Although the parts related to the Doctor are concrete, straightforward and to the point, Pink's words are far-fetched, abstract and irrelevant. This kind of dialogic outlook towards Pink and the Doctor allows for Pink's biographic and confessional self-expression. The Doctor is looking for Pink's physical malfunctioning while Pink is unconsciously revealing the real mental reasons for his breakdown. The Doctor may not even hear what Pink is saying, because Pink is laying bare his thoughts not to the Doctor. However, he addresses the Doctor by saying that:

Your lips move but I can't hear what you're saying.

None of them is able to hear the other. On the one hand, Pink cannot hear the Doctor because of the physical and mental malignancy he is undergoing, and on the other, the Doctor does not hear Pink because Pink is not speaking himself aloud. Therefore, Waters prepares the grounds for these characters to hear the other. But realistically, they are each expressing themselves without paying attention to the other. Pink has made up a theatre again in order to break down the formal hierarchies and expose himself to the audience. Again the doctor acts as a mediator between Pink and his audience. The Doctor's words aim at Pink's physical unease:

Hello?
Is there anybody in there?
Just nod if you can hear me.
Is there anyone at home?
Come on, now,
I hear you're feeling down.
Well I can ease your pain
Get you on your feet again.
Relax.
I'll need some information first.
Just the basic facts.
Can you show me where it hurts?

"Is there anybody out there?" asked by the Doctor alludes to the mental wall Pink has constructed around himself. But we know that he is not aware of the wall. We know that the only thing he is thinking of is getting Pink on his feet again in order to get the show going. In his second appearance in the song, the Doctor says that he is giving Pink "a little pin prick". All of these actions are performed in order to meet the Producer's financial benefits. That is how Pink subverts the Producer's hegemony in a song where the latter barely says a word.

"Comfortably Numb" takes the audience back to Pink's childhood. Pink reveals his early mental conflicts as a response to the Doctor's inquisitions. As an answer to "Can you show me where it hurts?", Pink starts bringing up reasons for his physical/psychological dis-ease. He refers to his childhood and points to events which have led to his present state:

When I was a child I had a fever
My hands felt just like two balloons.
Now I've got that feeling once again
I can't explain you would not understand
This is not how I am.
I have become comfortably numb.

The dialogic nature of this song also gives Pink the opportunity to demonstrate his antagonism towards the grand narratives and apparatuses which have consciously or unconsciously helped him build a wall. Through dialogue, Pink parodies the hierarchies and finds fault with them. He has found the cure at last: to stage a show and become the scenarist, to change the places and have dominance over the characters.

3.5 "The Trial" as dialogue

"The Trial" paves the way for more than two sides in order to dialogically negotiate. Pink, his mother, his wife, the schoolmaster, and the judge get a chance to express themselves. Although the only words outspoken by Pink show that he has gone out of his mind, he astutely allows others to convey their feelings. He has fully learned the art of subversion. He is accused of betraying his wife and mother, and deviating from the traditional norms in school. Therefore, the judge announces the final verdict by shouting out: "tear down the wall". Though Pink's language



game allows other language games to speak as well, he also reverses the roles. Superficially, he is the accused. But, if we go deep into the lyrics, we come to know that all of the complaining characters are themselves accused in Pink's mental theatre.

The judge is known as the "Worm". He is called upon in the beginning of the song:

Good morning, Worm your honor.
The crown will plainly show
The prisoner who now stands before you
Was caught red-handed showing feelings
Showing feelings of an almost human nature;
This will not do.

Pink is referred to as the prisoner, for he has captivated himself for such a long time. Pink's first attempt to subvert the hierarchies happens by showing that the worms have followed him. The lyrics plainly show that, even at the start, Waters is criticizing the "Crown", Britannia. Pink is accused of expressing emotions "of an almost human nature". This is Waters' method of parodying the Court.

The next character who is invited to announce his complaint is the schoolmaster. Instead of spending his time complaining about Pink, he allots his speech to point out his own conflicts:

I always said he'd come to no good
In the end your honor.
If they'd let me have my way I could
Have flayed him into shape.
But my hands were tied,
The bleeding hearts and artists
Let him get away with murder.
Let me hammer him today.

The film shows that the schoolmaster is on strings and his wife is the real master. The way he pronounces "murder" is really strange and is reminiscent of a kind of blind orthodoxy which lies in British culture and tradition. The images which had been used both in the album and the film find themselves reemphasized in "The Trial". Images like worms and hammers are portrayed to envisage Pink's hegemonic and Fascistic mentality.

Pink's wife accuses him of not spending more time talking to her. She is asking for extra time, like the schoolmaster, to take her revenge:

Just five minutes, Worm your honor,
Him and Me, alone.

She also makes a reference to the door in the wall. Pink also does this in one of his intermezzos. He looks for a way out by saying that:

There must have been a door there in the wall
When I came in.

His wife, on the other hand, wishes that "they throw away the key" so Pink could not find a way out of his self-captivated situation.

The overprotective mother insists on taking Pink back home. Her pronunciation is also of inflated British orthodoxy. She directly addresses Pink by saying:

Come to mother baby, let me hold you
In my arms.

But Pink had made it clear before that he does not need no arms around him. Incidentally, the film had shown his mother's embrace turning into bricks and walling in on him. Waters shows that the mother has not undergone any changes since Pink's imprisonment.

Pink's voice acts as a mediator throughout the lyrics and the song. He merely contemplates on his own state of mind which is one of total madness and bewilderment. He makes use of metaphors in order to explicate the nervous breakdown he is undergoing:

Crazy,
Toys in the attic I am crazy,



Truly gone fishing.
They must have taken my marbles away...
Crazy,
Over the rainbow, I am crazy,
Bars in the window.

The final verdict is decreed by the judge according to whom Pink has to be exposed before his peers. The judge's voice in the song represents a savage outlook towards the incarcerated Pink. The final solution will be to tear down the wall. But, this will not solve the problem, it will refuel the differend.

4. Conclusion

The Wall constructs a paralogical theatre where all the voices involved in the story get a chance to express themselves. As a matter of fact, Pink, the central character, is the director of this theatre. He manipulates the whole story in his mind in order to reverse the roles. He does this in retaliation, for he has neither the power nor the time to take revenge in real life.

The whole album can be seen as what might be called "interpellation". Pink interpellates others, that is, he puts them in the place of a subject, subjectifies them, as a result of which they must respond. Once they have responded, they have officially accepted Pink's subjectivity.

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