A year ago, I wasn’t really a Pink Floyd fan.

A year ago,

the only real knowledge I had of Floyd

was “Money”, “Time”, and “Wish You Were Here”

I never much thought about the band –
or about their lyrics.

My then 13-yr-old boy

buys a copy of Floyd’s

*Collection of Great Dance Songs*

and introduces me to the song “Sheep.”

I think

“wow ... that’s weird.”

The first couple minutes you only hear real faint
“baaaa baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah baaaaaahhhh.”

But, I listen and I connect.

“Sheep” by Pink Floyd...

“The Sheep Child” by James Dickey ...

“hey,” I think, “is there a relationship here?”

Two months of research

and 18 pages of text later ...

I have to say “Yes, Virginia,” there is a connection. ...

Hi. I’m Suzanne Webb

and I am here today to talk with you about the lyrics of Roger Waters.

Roger Waters, bassist, songwriter, and LYRICIST for Pink Floyd—
incorporated glimpses
into George Orwell’s *Animal Farm*
and interjected bits of James Dickey’s poem “Sheep Child”
into his songs.

Waters even consulted God himself.

Yet professors still pooh-pooh
the possibility that some *rockstar*
could be an accomplished poet –
perhaps literary genius.

The informed reader
is one who recognizes literary conventions
in the pieces they read;

The informed writer uses those same conventions in his or her own work.

Roger Waters is an informed writer.

Roger Waters is informed enough to cover Marxist theory and Intertextual ideologies, in his songs. When we employ these lenses to Waters’ words, we can also apply a cultural reading to his songs.

But even beyond the boundaries of these literary devices, Waters works delve into the political system in his home country of England,
and his obvious disapproval of capitalism
surges from album to album.

Perhaps his most insightful work though
explores the then hush-hush arena of Schizophrenia –
revealing yet another layer
to the depth
of Roger Waters’ profound knowledge.

Several Pink Floyd albums
are regarded as “concept albums” insomuch
as they feature one main concept
throughout the entirety of the record.

_**Wish You Were Here, Animals,** _and _**The Wall**
all three fall into the category of concept albums._
Throughout the Pink Floyd discography, Roger Waters’ lyrics contain both social and political statements and reflect a Marxist ideology.

“[S]ince the 1940s, Marxist Criticism has been “a discourse for interrogating all societies and their texts in terms of race, class, and the attitudes shared within a given culture...” On the album *Animals*, Waters called attention to class structure:

Phil Rose, author of *Which One’s Pink* says, “*Animals* is a critique
of the capitalist economic system.

Like Marx, Waters attempts
to illuminate the masses
about their exploitation and oppression. ...” he also
tries to reveal the effects
capitalism has on the nature of human beings—
the division it creates between them. (60) “

Waters critiques
the institutional settings of society.

His ability to draw his lyrics
from economic trends
and struggles of the working class,
promotes a cultural reading.
Eisner?

“Cultural critics want to make the term *culture* refer to *popular* culture as well as to that culture we associate with the so-called classics”

(English 800 Essay Sheet 415),

These attitudes are an integral part of the song “Breathe” which points directly at the dog-eat-dog world of work, work, work:

“Run, rabbit run / Dig that hole, forget the sun, / And when at last the work is done / Don’t sit down it’s time to start another one ... / You race toward an early grave” (Waters 1973),
These words reflect the lives of the English working class.

Rose says:

Waters “suggests that the typical ‘English’ method of coping with fears is to ‘hang on in quiet desperation.’

Theodor Adorno argues that

“television leads people away from talking to each other or questioning the oppression in their lives. Instead they get up and go to work... come home and switch on TV, absorb TV’s nonsense until bedtime,
and then the daily cycle starts again”

(www.theory.org.uk). end quote.

The words to “Time”
also deal with these same attitudes:

“And you run and you run
to catch up with the sun, but it’s sinking /
And racing around to come up behind you again /
The sun is the same in the relative way, but you’re older / Shorter of breath and one day closer to death”

(Waters 1973).

Adorno’s theory
and the songs “Breathe” and “Time”
all three
depict an endlessly-depressing
work-sleep-work pattern.

These lyrics, though,
go one layer deeper than class struggle
They denote the literal passing of time as well. Critics
often look for the unseen,
or the purposely ignored elements,
within a work of literature.
What element is missing throughout these works?

*Carpe Diem*—
the world of Roger Waters’ peers is so bleak,
they toil and toil and never even *think*
to “seize the day.”
These works can be looked at inter-textually as well.

Many reports link the Pink Floyd album *Animals* to the George Orwell novel *Animal Farm*.

Rose says: “Waters equates all humans to one of three types of animals: dogs, pigs, or sheep.”

“[this] hierarchy coincides with Orwell’s, whose pigs, protected by the dogs, are the ruling ‘class’; His sheep are the most mindlessly unquestioning of their oppression (Rose 60).

The song “Sheep”
also contains a parody

on the twenty-third Psalm:

“The Lord is my Shepherd,

I shall not want. /

He makes me down to lie. /

Through pastures green he leadeth me

/ The silent waters by. /

With bright knives

he releaseth my soul...

/ He converted me to lamb cutlets...”

(Waters 1977).

James Dickey’s poem

“The Sheep Child” may well be reflected

in the song “Sheep”
as Waters employs a “sheepdog”
to talk to the sheep.

The sheepdog says,

“[w]hat a surprise!

/ A look of terminal shock in your eyes.

/ Now things are really what they seem.

/ No, this is no bad dream”

(Waters 1977).

The “sheepdog” reciting these lyrics
may allude to Dickey’s

“thing that’s only half / Sheep like a wooly baby”

(Dickey 1966).

The song “Sheep” was written in 1977,

after the book Animal Farm--1945,

after the poem “the Sheep Child”--1966.
Waters’ works appears
built from classic literature.
Although the classic literature he refers to
may or may not be the literary canon, still,
written by well-known,
well-respected authors,
should be considered just as definitive:
MURFIN says:
Cultural critics
have been especially critical
of the departmental structure
of universities,
for that structure,
perhaps more than anything else,
has kept the study of the ‘arts’
more or less distinct
from the study of history,
television, film, ... [and] current affairs.
By doing so,
the departmental structure of universities
has reasserted the high/low culture distinction.
(Murfin 417)

Theodor Adorno
“argued that capitalism fed people
with the products of a ‘culture society’
and “[t]hat social relations
and cultural experiences
are objectified in terms of money” (www.theory.org.uk).
Waters expresses his views on capitalism and “the English way” \((1973)\) in Floyd’s album *Dark Side of the Moon.*

“Money,” Floyd’s most legendary song, reeks of capitalism and seems to be a direct reflection of Adorno’s theory.

At the onset of “Money,” listeners are told to

“*[g]et a good job with more pay and you’re OK / Money, it’s a gas.*”

This line says everything is fine and fun—
as long as there is money.

With the line

“[g]rab that cash with both hands
and make a stash[,]”

the narrator becomes greedy, and, by song’s end, “[m]oney, it’s a crime,”
denotes a change,
and now the narrator has been consumed
by his wealth.

And--Isn’t Waters using the band as a symbol for all
who become consumed by wealth?
Waters says,
We get obsessed with things
and there aren’t enough things, products,
to go round. ... If we’re persuaded
it’s important to have them,
that we’re nothing without them ... (Rose 78)

*then we idunnowhatthesaid here*

This man
understands people, greed,
and life.

On the album *The Wall*,
the song “Another Brick in the Wall, Part II”
deals with the education system in England
as Waters knew it.
“When we grew up and went to school
There were certain teachers who would
Hurt the children any way the could”

Waters says:
My school life was ... awful ...
bad [teachers]
can really do people in ...
some ... treated the children so badly...
never encouraging them...
just trying to keep them quiet and still,
and crush them into the right shape.

(Rose 95)

“The English way” of education
certainly did not suit Roger Waters.

Critics should feed on

“[w]e don’t need no education /
we don’t need no thought control
/no dark sarcasm

in the classroom”

and ask more questions.

Waters’ sarcasm rings loud and clear.

Waters,

throughout his thirty-plus-year career,

never ignores the struggle

his contemporaries endured in England,

yet he is diverse enough
to delve into the world of psychology

examining the psyche of his once band-mate,

Syd Barrett.

You may recall, Barrett’s passing this past July.

Mary Oliver,

in *A Poetry Handbook*, says,

“contemporary poets ... tell the reader

the most intimate details of the writer’s life” (79).

Waters’ words certainly emulate

Oliver’s viewpoint.

Some reports point to Barrett’s LSD usage

as the cause of his mental problems –
whether the drugs were self medication because of his confused psyche or whether his unbalanced psyche fueled the need to self-medicate – we will never know.

Substance abuse can cause psychotic disorders Mentalhealth.com says:

“Substances such as ... LSD mimic the effects of a natural neurotransmitter on the neurons in the brain’s pleasure center”

(Halgin, Whitbourne 404).

Numerous Floyd songs depict Schizophrenia.
In the early 1970s,
psychiatric issues were
“kept in the closet” –
considered a taboo subject.
This did not stop Roger Waters;
who said?
“literature supplies those possibilities
which have been excluded by the prevalent system”
(English 800 quote sheet), and Waters’ words
tear away some of the shroud
surrounding psychiatry.

*Remember when you were young,*

*you shone like the sun.*

*Shine on you crazy diamond.*

*Now there’s a look in your eyes,*
like black holes in the sky
You were caught on the crossfire
of childhood and stardom,
blown on the Steel breeze.

Come on you target for faraway laughter
, come on you stranger, you legend,
You martyr, and shine!

Well you wore out your welcome
with random precision
, rode on the Steel breeze.

Come on you raver,

you seer of visions and shine

The

“look in your eyes
, like black holes in the sky”

signifies a faraway glaze,

reminiscent of a lost look,

a hollow and empty space.

Waters goes on

to intensify this vision of Barrett’s psychoses

with “you seer of visions... you prisoner.”

Schizophrenia,

a severe thought disorder,

includes periods of delusions

and hallucinations,

and possibly paranoia,

coupled with very strange beliefs.

This theme of schizophrenia

flows into other songs as well.
In “Wish You Were Here,”
title track on Floyd’s 1975 album,
Waters asks,

“did you exchange a walk on part in the war
for a lead role in a cage?”

Waters says that Barrett
is a symbol for all people.

Confirming this, in *Which One’s Pink*,
Waters says,

[T]he world is a very, very sad fucking place...
I’m very sad about Syd...

“Shine On’s” not really about [him] –
he’s ... a symbol

for all the extremes of absence

some people have to indulge in
because it’s the only way
they can cope
with how fucking sad it is—
modern life,
to withdraw completely. (Rose 42)

Furthering Waters’ discussion of psychology,
the song “Brain Damage”
paints a frightening picture of lobotomies:

“The lunatic is in my head

The lunatic is in my head

You raise the blade, you make the change

you rearrange me ‘till I’m sane

You lock the door and throw away the key

There’s someone in my head
*but it’s not me*” (Waters 1973).

Modern psychiatric drugs were not even introduced until the 1950s;

moreover, “[u]ntil the 1970s, care procedures of psychologically-disturbed people were sometimes as barbaric as those used in the Middle Ages.

Phil Rose asks Waters in an interview if Ken Keeseay’s *One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest* had been a catalyst in Waters’ works?

Waters replies he *quote* “thought it was a fantastic novel ...
read it a number of times” (Rose 164).

One becomes influenced after a close reading of any literary work.

“Brain Damage” might well be influenced by Keesey.

A thorough glimpse into these lyrics includes acknowledging Freud’s Psychoanalytical theory at work as well.

The song “Mother” discusses overprotective mothers,

plus, according to Rose,
the Mother in the song quote

“appears to be driven

partially by contempt for her son”(99).

*Mother do you think they’ll drop the bomb?*

*Mother do you think they’ll like the song?*

*Mother do you think they’ll try to break my balls?*

*Mother should I build a wall?*

Rose goes on to say The narrator of “Mother”

exhibits “the common schizoid characteristics

of sense of superiority to others” (Rose 100).

*Hush, now baby don’t you cry.*

*Moma’s gonna’ make all of your*

*Nightmares come true.*

*Mama’s gonna’ put all her fears into you.*

*Mama’s gonna keep you right here*
Under her wing.

She won’t let you fly, but she might let you sing.

Mama will keep baby cozy and warm.

The narrator of “Mother”
is at least as confused as Mother herself.

Of course Mama’s going to help build the wall

The narrator of “Mother”
may even be dealing with
symptoms of the Oedipus complex.

Freud says,
It is the fate of all, perhaps,
to direct our first sexual impulses
towards our mothers...

but, more fortunate than [Oedipus],
we have meanwhile succeeded,

in so far as

we have not become psychoneurotics,

in detaching our

sexual impulses from our mothers. (Kennedy 797)

Most of us have detached, perhaps,

but not the narrator of “Mother.”

_Mother did it have to be so high?_

(**pause**)

The use of symbolism
to allude to something outside of a poet’s work
is a common literary technique.
A recurring symbol in Pink Floyd music is the “Steel breeze” which appears in several songs.

According to Mary Oliver, quote: “figurative language... another term for imagery... is a concrete, nonliteral, informing representation of something. This [‘]something[’] might be a person, a thing, or an abstraction.” end quote

Could Waters’ “Steel breeze” be an allusion to a hard, cold life?

The word steel appears in, at least,
“Shine on You Crazy Diamond,”

“Wish You Were Here,” ... and “Sheep.”

Rose states, “

[t]he ‘Steel breeze’ is a powerful image

because it suggests

some invisible force in the universe... which,

as cold and sharp as steel,

presents resistance

to the aspirations of human beings,

or is even capable of ‘blowing’ them

entirely ‘off course[,]’ as in Barrett’s case” (46).

......

Thirty-five years ago,

Roger Waters dealt with themes
of class structure, cultural attitudes,

social and political concerns, and psychology;

he still does so today.

Waters even now

speaks provocatively through his music.

Released in October 2005,

Ca Ira,

a full-orchestra opera

based on the French Revolution,

is his latest genius.

Waters says, “There’s quite a lot

of musical references in it

to past pieces of work

that I’ve just borrowed” (Rose 170)

--inviting Marxist and Frankfurt School readings
of this accomplishment.

**In September 2005,**

*USA Today* reported:

Waters initially resisted trying to draw parallels between late 18\textsuperscript{th} Century France and current social conditions.

[but Waters says:] ‘I thought:

Well, ... in France ... back then,

you had this rigid, hierarchical structure where the King was considered divinely instructed by God and had absolute power ...

but the majority of the people had nothing.’

“That’s very much like the situation we have now
with some Western civilizations.

I think George Bush

believes he’s operating

on a license from the Almighty.

And ... you have a very, very small number of people

who control 99% of all the stuff in the world ...

the rest are like the French peasantry end quote”

(Gardner)

(***pause***)

Today a Google search for “Pink Floyd”

nets 18,000,000 results.

Eight-teen

Mil-lion

results.
Surely the genius of Roger Waters is more than just that of a stereotypical rock-n-roller. Critics agree; 18 million fans agree; Perhaps the Pulitzer committee should.

A Pulitzer Prize is awarded quote: “[f]or a distinguished example of feature writing giving prime consideration to high literary quality and originality” (www.pulitzer.org).

Roger Waters’ lyrics overflow with literary quality.

Pink Floyd’s Dark Side of the Moon stayed on “Billboard’s” top 200 “longer than any other album in history,
namely 591 consecutive weeks”
(pinkfloyd.co.uk), until it made
the Guinness Book of World Records
(pinkfloyd.co.uk) -- proof of Waters’ originality.

If the Pulitzer committee
could deem a “concept album” as “feature writing,”
then Roger Waters would already have one.

If this man can incorporate Marxist theory,
intertextuality, cultural criticisms,
psychoanalysis and political perspectives
into his lyrics....

*Without a doubt,*

*‘something remarkable*
Webb, Suzanne 41

*dwells in Roger Waters.*

Go home, put on some Pink Floyd.

Put on your favorite band.

Or listen to something entirely new. ...

‘What are *THEY* saying?

‘We as a society haven’t talked much

‘about song lyrics

not since Joan Baez and Country Joe and the Fish.

And, *THAT* my friends

was a LONG, *L O N G*, fucking time ago....

Roger Waters wrote some works

whose meanings carry from the culture of the 1970s

into today -- and on into tomorrow.
Moreover,

thought-provoking lyrics such as his – already considered “art” – should also be considered *true LITERATURE*.

Besides,

I think there are other artists who’ve done this same thing, and I don’t think we’re looking deep enough into what *they all* have to say.

***

*THANK YOU.*

*may I take your questions?*