

## **Poetics of Anger in John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Femi Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song*.**

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### **Abstract**

Anger is a basic human emotion which has a force for constructive or destructive ends. Its expression in any circumstance can be a trigger for a desire to change a prevailing situation. In all cases, anger is a fundamental component of art. In Osborne and Osofisan, extreme anger as both material and style is what marks them out. Its reification by the intellect provides a potent instrument for investigating society. This study examines the use of anger in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song*. Osborne and Osofisan are two writers who are very anxious to change their societies. The paper is a comparative study of a British and a Nigerian playwright who wrote at different times yet share similar concerns. The study is primarily concerned with the early plays of Osborne and Osofisan where anger is strongest and where their artistic triumph is most poignant. The paper reveals that anger is the point of departure for their art and concludes that it is both material and motivating force for their writings. The anger expressed in these works are not mere hysterics but cerebral.

**Keywords:** Anger, Osborne, Osofisan, Cerebral, Hysterics

## Introduction

This study is a comparative analysis of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* and Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song*, an English and a Nigerian play whose aim is to reform society by drawing attention to the ills in their societies. Like all comparative studies where the influences of a foreign author on a local one are extracted, this study is more interested in exploring certain interconnectedness in terms of theme, form and the period in which these authors wrote. Our work is interdisciplinary as it dwells on anger which is a topic in psychology, sociology, literature and culture generally. This singular idea is pivotal to the analysis of these two plays. Anger is an emotional construct which is germane and integral to the art of these two writers from two disparate continents. This paper examines these two plays while focusing on the playwrights' utilization of the term "anger".

The paper discusses how anger is replicated in the drama of these two playwrights. Anger is expressed both in their ideology and practice of playwriting and this confers on their works the term, drama of anger. This term is revealed in their intense concern and disenchantment with society. It informs their consciousness, conditions their creative impulse, a thematic preoccupation in the plays and is demonstrated in the speeches of the protagonist. The paper is however more interested in demonstrating that the portrait of "anger" in the art of Osborne and Osofisan does not whittle down their art, contrary to assumptions that their reformist zeal tends to overwhelm the artistry of their plays. The methodological procedure adopted is to scrutinize and interpret the speeches of key characters while relying extensively on earlier studies of their plays.

## Contextualising Anger

A central concept in this paper is "anger" and it needs to be properly conceptualized. It is generally believed to be a destructive unpleasant, immature, aggressive, hostile, anti-social, impulsive, abominable and an indecent emotion. Thus, it is a much maligned emotion considering its positive aspect as an unavoidable fact of life and a feature of human interaction. This seemingly ignoble emotion is also a weapon of self-assertion because it is excited by a sense of wrong. People are bound to be angry when mistreated or when others refuse to obey social laws. Anger is thus a sociological and philosophical issue, an emotion (thus psychological) that can be triggered by social injustice such as anger at racism or sexism. Anger in this case falls into what Grasso regards as "vital political tool. It enables new perspectives, new understanding of oppressive conditions that had previously remained unquestioned" (Grasso 4). It is in this last sense that we utilised this term in understanding the plays of Osborne and Osofisan.

Harriet Goldhor-Lerner's definition of anger in her book; *A Dance of Anger* is also germane to our study. She states:

Anger is a signal .... It may be a message that we are being hurt, that our rights are being violated; that our needs or wants are not being adequately met or simply that something is not right. [1]

In other words, "anger" is a product of social interaction and to some extent, a useful response to frustration. It is, thus, not a totally negative emotion. In this regard, we agree with Carol Tavris when she posits that:

Anger is not a disease, with a single cause; it is a process, a transaction, a way of communicating. With the possible exception of anger caused by organic abnormalities, most angry episodes are social events. They assume meaning only in terms of the social contract between participants. [162]

The drama of anger has its origin in Jarry Alfred's *Ubu Roi* in 1896 . It was said to contain such harsh words and 'savage disdain' (Carter 1969:117). According to Gbemisola Adeoti, Wole Soyinka's *King Baabu* that chronicles the sadistic years of General Sani Abacha in Nigeria is an adaptation of Jarry Alfred's earlier play.(Adeoti 2010:26)

### **Background of Study**

As a member of the society, a writer is confronted with myriads of social, economic and political issues and these in most cases, engage his attention. He reacts to these tensions in different ways: he could escape from the scene of grave corruption and moral ineptitude by resorting to dreams in his writings as a way of confronting the situation, or the writer could, in disgust and great moral outrage, "take up arms" through his art. He could lash out against societal ills in overt terms, employing angry language and satire with the sole aim of shocking the society to an awareness of the ills. In this paper, our concern is with writers who are greatly irked by social and political circumstances of their times and thus, employ their art as an instrument of social criticism and social engineering.

On the English stage, no playwright before John Osborne has been so vituperative in his art. From Shakespeare to Ben Johnson, Richard Sheridan, Oliver Goldsmith, no dramatist has engaged the society frontally like Osborne. Their dramas have been largely conformist, pandering to the taste of the society. Even in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the Twentieth when drama in Europe and America emerged as an instrument for the discussion of serious issues in both form and content, writers like Henrik Ibsen in Norway, Strindberg in Sweden, Pirandello in Italy, Arthur Miller in America and Anton Chekhov in Russia blazed the trail. Of note in Britain is the work of George Bernard Shaw who was the first English dramatist to use his plays for the discussion of serious issues. The efforts of J.M Synge, W.B Yeats, W.H Auden, T.S Eliot, C. Isherwood and Christopher Fry were largely in the area of restoring vitality to drama through poetry.

The events after the Second World War of 1939-1945 demanded a new type of drama. The end of the war seemed to mark the beginning of a new era for drama. Post-War Britain was a period of serious social and political upheavals, especially with the breakdown of the class system. It was a society where so much was expected from those in authority but nothing was forthcoming. This ultimately led to disillusionment and despair. However, there was liberalisation in education which made many people in the middle and working classes able to go to university despite the unavailability of jobs (Ward 1964, 17). Thus the enormous problems of this era provided the basis for the new dramatic efflorescence championed by new playwrights and writers like John Osborne, Ann Jellicoe, Kingsley Amis, C. Wilson, Alan Sillitoe and John Arden. These writers were young and felt more keenly the deleterious effects of the malaise in the society. They, therefore brazenly used their art to encapsulate this despair and negotiate social change. They were not subtle and ironic but belligerent and vitriolic, "left-wing" and irreverent.

John Osborne was a leading light in this era. As a member of the lower middle class, he wrote plays that dealt with class struggles with passion. He was an actor, playwright, theatre and film director and later became a Lord in the British Upper House, a fact which should have changed his non-conformist attitude towards the aristocracy in particular. He died in 1994. His plays include *The Entertainer*, *Luther*, *A Patriot For Me*, *Time Present and Inadmissible Evidence*. His philosophy of playwriting is expressed in the following comment:

I want to make people feel, to give them lessons in feeling. They can think afterwards. ... (Banham 19... 30).

This attitude earned him and the other the term “Angry Young man”, a sobriquet which was a catch-phrase in Britain in the middle and late 1950s. It was used to refer to young writers who were vocal in their depiction of the disillusionment and dissatisfaction of young men at that time. The term, according to Kenneth Allsop (19... 18) suggests many things which include “irreverence, stridency, impatience with tradition, vigour, vulgarity, sulky resentment against the cultivated...” The term was first used by Leslie Allen Paul in 1951 as the title of an autobiographical book (Allsop 19... 19). It expressed the state of mind of many people in Britain at this time and *Look Back in Anger* helped shape this trend.

John Russell Taylor in his book, *Anger and After* popularises the term when he states:

8 May 1956 still marks the breakthrough of a new drama into the British theatre; and Osborne himself remains... the first of the “Angry Young Men” and arguably the biggest shock to the system of British theatre since the advent of Shaw. (Taylor 19 pg 37)

On the Nigerian stage also, no playwright has expressed so much anger and dissatisfaction like Femi Osofisan. Before him, the 1<sup>st</sup> generation writers like Wole Soyinka, J.P Clark-Bekederemo, Zulu Sofola and Ola Rotimi were mainly reactionary in their vision, pandering to traditional expositions and sometimes, imitating the art of the West in order to prove that their works were of equal quality with those of western writers.

However, with the civil war of 1967-1970 and its attendant social and economic problems, new writers emerged. The oil boom after the civil war created a sharp gap between the rich and the poor and these new writers imbibed the Marxist aesthetics and philosophy in their analysis of the societal problems. The writers are Kole Omotosho, Bode Sowande, Wale Ogunyemi among others. These writers are referred to as “Second-generation” writers (Ogunbiyi 19... 36; Obafemi 19... 168). Their attitude to societal ills is revolutionary and their aim is to change society through their plays. Osofisan occupies a significant place in this group as the most strident and most prolific of all of them. (Jeyifo and Irele 19+ pages)

Femi Osofisan is a university lecturer, theatre director and manager, playwright, novelist, poet and essayist. His plays include *Morountodun*, *Birthdays are not for Dying*, *Farewell to a Cannibal Rage*, *Women of Owu* and *Once Upon Four Robbers*. He does not just reflect the ills in society but artistically proffers a way of escape for the society. Thus, because the times are different, he repudiates the romantic explorations of Soyinka and Clark while becoming belligerent and vocal in his treatment of societal ills. In “The Alternative Tradition: A Survey of Nigerian Literature after the War”. (19- p) Osofisan observes that:

The older writers represented a watershed, in both the socio-historical and the purely aesthetic aspects of artistic expression, and it was a watershed from

which we had to depart in order to keep our rendezvous with history... Muted now are the lyrical clairvoyant cadences of Okigbo, the raw, inchoate passions of Soyinka, and his challenging esotericism; and muted also Achebe's sedate, serious concern for the often tragic mutation in social culture. These voices, together with their unending mythopoetic narcissism had to be outgrown and left behind, because when all is said and done, behind their genuine human attitude there was always a plea for a reactionary or simply impracticable idealist utopia, engaged in false maze of a tragic cycle. (Osofisan 19... 783)

Therefore, Osofisan departs from these writers and states his aim:

To use the weapon we had, our pen, our zeal and our eloquence – to awaken in our people the song of liberation. With our writing, we would wash the stigma away, the stigma of inferiority, rouse our dormant energies, unmask the pest and traitor among us, preach the positive sermons. Our works would be a weapon in the struggle to bring our country to the foremost ranks of modern nations. Our songs would call for radical alternative. (Osofisan 1987:6)

Thus, the same attitude to societal ills is noted in both playwrights. Their response to earlier writers before them forms yet another area of similarity as revealed in the historical background traced in this section of the paper. How is this attitude represented in the works of Osborne and Osofisan? This will form the focus of attention in the next section.

### **The Poetics of Anger in Osborne's *Look Back in Anger***

Anger is remarkably present in *Look Back in Anger*. It is emblazoned in the title and it colours Osborne's criticism of his society as seen in the various attacks on class, the Establishment and religion. Acknowledged by many readers and commentators as Osborne's first and most famous work, the play launched Osborne into stardom. Osborne's anger, at the various injustices in the society, is championed by the major character, Jimmy Porter, who articulates the disillusionment of the post-war youth in Britain at that time. Hitherto, Britain was regarded as a superpower, but with the decline in her empire by the colonies' declaration of Independence, Britain lost most of these territories and this had a great effect on her social and economic life.

John Russell Taylor (1968:14), writing in the introduction to his edited book entitled, *John Osborne: Look Back in Anger*, observes that "... 1956 the year of *Look Back in Anger* was rather rich in causes for agitation or disillusionment ...." [14]. He listed the causes of agitation as, the revolt in Hungary, the Suez Canal debacle and the unrest in Britain by the people over nuclear disarmament [14]. Britain thus had many problems on her hands. The myth of "the Empire on which the sun never sets" or that of "Britain rules the waves" was gone especially with Suez Canal debacle which humiliated Britain and destroyed the myth or illusion of a

superpower. Egypt had gone on to nationalise the Suez Canal which at that time was controlled by Britain. Britain and France mobilised forces to wage war against Egypt and could have carried it through but for the intervention of the United States. Britain thus lost face. The people's self esteem was affected and the image of Britain as a superpower dimmed. This loss is a discomfiting socio-political development that was capable of engineering a measure of anger from the people. Osborne is one of the writers who addressed Britain's fortunes in the post-imperial era. As a matter of fact, from a reading of the British Drama, Osborne is the first to challenge the place of the monarchy on the stage.

Even within Britain, there was unrest. Young people who were the major beneficiaries of the mass tertiary education which had come as a result of the Education Act of 1944 could not secure jobs. In fact, Jimmy Porter with his university education ends up running a "sweet stall". Jimmy Porter is therefore, symbolic of this age and it is in him that we observe the anger of his group – anger against the way the authorities and society have treated them. He lashes out at everyone and finds fault with everything. Ronald Hayman puts this observation succinctly:

Jimmy Porter pours the same sulphuric energy into the attacks he launches on anything that surrounds him – Alison, Cliff, Helena, the Sunday Papers, the social system, women in general, conservative members of the parliament, Billy Graham, the H. Bomb, people who don't like Jazz ... [4]

Anger is easily expressed against established institutions. This is what can be termed anti-establishmentarianism. "Anti-Establishment" becomes a sub-theme in *Look Back in Anger*. By "Establishment", we refer to the government, royalty and its apparatuses. Nigel, Alison's brother represents the British Politician – "the platitude from outer space" [24]. Jimmy sees Nigel as the young politician who has sold the people out through his "vaguery" and it is here that his attack on the Establishment is most pungent. Banham's view throws more light on the societal institution represented by Nigel:

In fact, Nigel is being used as the symbol for Jimmy's general enemies, those he sees as smug, privileged, and, what's more, successful. On the way, he manages to attack the conservative party, its candidates and supporters, politicians in general, the regular army and its officer corps, and the public schools. [20]

Class is equally attacked in the play. Alison's father, Colonel Redfern, his wife, Helena and all of Alison's posh friends, and the Bishop of Bromley represent the enemies that must be attacked because they belong to the privileged class. To Jimmy, these people are "militant, arrogant, and full of malice or vague" [19]. They are those with "money and no brains" and are insensitive to others. [44] He is however enamoured of poor workers like Cliff, Hugh, his mother and preferably Madeline who are poor, sensitive and have big hearts [85]. As a matter of fact, Alison's mother comes in for the greatest amount of criticism:

... there is no limit to what the middle-aged mummy will do in the holy crusade against ruffians like me. Mummy and I took one last quick look at each other, and from then on, the age of chivalry was dead. I

knew that, to protect her innocent young, she wouldn't hesitate to cheat, lie, bully and blackmail. [52]

Jimmy sees himself as “a young man without money, background or looks, who was not going to be intimidated because of that” [52]. He rages on, calling Alison's mother “an old bitch and she should be dead” [53]. This terrible assault goes on:

My God, those worms will need a good dose of salts the day they get through her! Oh what a bellyache you've got coming to you, my little wormy ones! Alison's mother is on the way! (*In what intends to be a comic declamatory voice*). She will pass away, my friends, leaving a trail of worms gasping for laxatives behind her - from purgatives to purgatory. [53]

The plot of *Look Back in Anger* is a conventional one. On the surface, it tells a story of the marriage between two people from different classes in the society, the problems of such a union, the wife leaving the scene and her eventual return. Martin Banham observes that “*Look Back in Anger* is in fact, a piece of straightforward dramatic realism ...” (12). However, in this simple story of a failed marriage is built the issues of class, alienation and the socio-political circumstances of the Britain of 1956.

It is significant to note that all the actions of this play take place in one set – the Porters' one-room flat in the Midlands. Prior to this time [1956], plays of Terrence Rattigan, Christopher Fry and of T.S. Eliot show elaborate setting in usually what is called drawing-room comedy. The bare setting of *Look Back in Anger* is at once a shock to its audience and a very realistic pointer to the acute housing problems of the time. On this point, Stephen Lacey avers that,

.... The realism of a set like this asks to be judged not only in relation to the observable social reality beyond the stage but also against other kinds of theatre; in both senses the play was a considered provocation. (29)

We encounter Alison on the ironing-board, a domestic labour that is absent on the stage of a well-made play. Reacting to the setting of *Look Back in Anger*, Martin Banham asserts that “the setting of the play... is... a revolution in itself” (12). He states that “the audience was invited to look into a world that was singularly sordid but very real” (12). To him, “the set was a real challenge” to the audience's “sensitivity and stomach” (13). In the simplicity of the setting, John Osborne invites us to the housing problems of 1956 England. It was as realistic as it was sordid. The play opens on a Sunday evening with Jimmy and Cliff reading the newspapers. Alison, Jimmy's wife is at the ironing board. It is however, in Jimmy's speech that we are introduced to the class system in Britain. Jimmy expresses his anger at the “high and mighty tone” of the papers. The Sunday newspapers are divided into “wet” and “posh”. Jimmy criticises the “posh” ones for their deliberate act of excluding the “common” people by writing three columns of an article in French. He also attacks the reviews for being the same even with different books: “Why do I do this every Sunday? Even the book reviews seem to be the same as last week's. Different books – same reviews...” (10). Nothing changing. By writing three

columns of an article in French, Carter suggests that “we immediately have an example of the social barrier, the upper class resenting the interest which may be shown in the English novel by the “common” man – thus they discuss it in a language only “they” will understand”(23). Jimmy Porter kicks against this idea and thus “became a representative of a generation determined to destroy this kind of “injustice” (Carter 23). It is this kind of intellectual snobbery that Jimmy fights against.

According to Alan Carter (1969:144), Osborne “by the use of language attempts to penetrate our indifference and to make us care about the way in which we live .... Carter goes on to state that Osborne uses blunt language to convey his idea and that in his plays, there is “no place for the ornate or the delicate”. His voice is that of an angry man, a voice that “mirrored” the people’s confusion and their disenchantment with the social injustice of their time.

The language of the play is peculiar because it is an angry language. The emotive force and the vehemence with which Jimmy Porter speaks, makes the language significant. His language is that of an angry man. The everyday language of Jimmy is repetitive and his speech constitutes most of the dialogue in the play. He shouts and swears in his bid to shock his other characters and the audience. Although it is an everyday language and not the literary style of the plays of Terence Rattigan, T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry, whose plays preceded Osborne’s. Carter substantiates this when he states:

Osborne’s plays expressed the despair of a frustrated idealism. They did so in a language which was new to the theatre – everyday English. A vocabulary which could be heard in the street, in shops, at football matches, in the cinema and at home. *Look Back in Anger* brought contemporary language to the stage.... (144)

Lending credence to this fact, Carter quotes Tynan in *The Observer* (1961) where the latter observes that “... poet and dialectician he may not be, but master of rhetoric he assuredly is.... he has raised fair ground barking to the level and intensity of art.” (quoted in Carter 148).

Jimmy’s language is mainly monologic as we find him carrying on the talk with little or no response from the other characters, and in these monologues, or what Carter calls “long speeches” (145), “we hear the articulate flow of Osborne’s ideas achieving their lyric effects and ordinary everyday English phrases and words take on new meaning” (145). Jimmy’s long speeches or “tirades” are kept alive by their passion. The stark rhetoric catches the audiences’ attention and invites us to the injustice prevalent in that society. The direct attack of Jimmy on Nigel, Alison’s brother, offers a good illustration of what we have in mind:

Have you ever seen her brother? Brother Nigel?  
The Straight-backed, chinless wonder from Sandhurst? ... The Platitude from Outer space – that’s Brother Nigel. He’ll end up in the Cabinet one day, make no mistake. But somewhere at the back of that mind is the vague knowledge that he and his pals have been plundering and fooling everybody for generations.... Now Nigel is just as vague as you can get without being actually invisible. And invisible politicians aren’t much use to anyone – not even his supporters! *And nothing is*



*more vague about Nigel than his knowledge of life and ordinary human beings is so hazy, he really deserves some sort of decoration for it – a medal inscribed “For Vaguery in the Field”.... Besides, he’s a patriot and an Englishman, and he doesn’t like the idea that he may have been selling out his countrymen all these years, so what does he do? The only thing he can do – seek sanctuary in his stupidity. (20 Emphasis mine.)*

Jimmy’s language is harsh and strong and in the above quotation, it directly attacks the person of Nigel and what he stands for – the British military caste and its politics. Stephen Lacey sees “the long set-pieces, angry, bitter and occasionally joyous tirades by Jimmy” without accounting for its representation in the play. The illustration is one of Jimmy’s fights with Alison. It also represents Jimmy’s outrage at the injustices of his period.

A study of the content of Jimmy’s language reveals the use of invectives, vituperation, insults and metaphors of abuse. Carter (19... 12) submits that “Osborne’s most expletives are “bloody”, “bastard” and various combinations of “damn”. To respond to Alison accompanying Helena to church, Jimmy retorts: “You Judas. You phlegm. She’s taking you with her and you’re so bloody feeble ....” [59]. Cliff also refers to Jimmy as “ ... bloody pig” [12]. Even the church bells ringing outside the flatlet is referred to as “bloody bells” [25]. The “Church bell” represents a world outside Jimmy’s and this world torments him:

Oh hell! Now the bloody bells have started!  
(*He rushes to the window*)  
Wrap it up, will you? Stop ringing those bells!  
There’s somebody going crazy in here! I don’t want  
to hear them! [25]

The “Church bells” represent the religion of the people and is one of the institutions Jimmy Porter attacks for invading his peace in the flat. The word, “old” appears consistently in Jimmy’s description of people. Talking of Alison’s father, he says “The *Old* Edwardian brigade” [17] or on page 66 where he calls the man, “poor *Old* Daddy – just one of those sturdy *old* plants left over from the Edwardian Wilderness that can’t understand why the sun isn’t shining anymore.” [66] The word “old” does not only refer to the issue of age alone but also to Jimmy’s angry way of talking about Alison’s father.

Jimmy likens his wife to a “chocolate meringues” – “sweet and sticky on the outside and sink your teeth in it ... inside, all white, messy and disgusting ....” [49] Some other abusive similes appearing in the play are: “You’re like a sexual maniac – only with you its food.” [12] “You sit there like a lump of dough” [17] “... Oh, it’s more like a zoo everyday!” [26].

Osborne is also shown as harbouring very strong anti-feminist ideas. To him, women are very noisy. He says through Jimmy:

... Have you ever noticed how noisy women are .... Have you? The way they kick the floor about, simply walking over it? Or have you watched them sitting at their dressing tables, dropping their weapons and banging down their bits of boxes and brushes and lipsticks? [24]

He continues:

I've watched her doing it night after night. When you see a woman in front of her bedroom mirror, you realise what a refined sort of butcher she is [Turns in] Did you ever see some dirty old Arab, sticking his fingers into some mess of lamb fat and gristle? Well, she's just like that. Thank God they don't have many women surgeons! Those primitive hands would have your guts out in no time. Flip! Out it comes, like the powder out of its box. Flop! Back it goes, like the powder puff on the table. [24]

Jimmy goes on to tell the audience of when he "had a flat underneath a couple of girls!" He refers to them as "bastards". He says that "the most simple, everyday actions were a sort of assault course on your sensibilities" and he would scream the most "ingenious obscenities" at them yet nothing moves them. To those girls, he says, "a simple visit to the lavatory sounded like a medieval siege." [24-5] Jimmy can thus, be seen as harbouring misogynist ideas.

Jimmy's ranting on the issue on women continues:

Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death? Have you ever had a letter, and on it is franked "please Give Your Blood Generously"? Well, the Postmaster-General does that, on behalf of all the women of the world. [84]

Many critics like Michelene Wandor have reacted to the misogynist language of Jimmy. Wandor, as quoted in Denison [Ed.], states that "Alison is servicing the domestic scene and demonstrating to the audience in an immediate visual way", [that is, by ironing and by wearing one of Jimmy's shirts] that she is Jimmy's property.

Jimmy makes an incisive statement which expresses his disenchantment with the present state of affairs in Britain at that time: "I suppose people of our generation aren't able to die for good causes any longer. We had all that done for us, in the thirties and the forties, when we were still kids.... They aren't any good causes left" [84]. Osborne claims this statement is the expression of pure despair but it can be seen as the expression of strong disenchantment with life in the fifties.

The use of harsh language and invectives especially characterise the relationship between Jimmy and Alison, two individuals from different classes of the society in a marital relationship. Jimmy humiliates, taunts, bullies, provokes, abuses and torments Alison, all in bid to get her to respond physically to him. He calls her and her brother "sycophantic, phlegmatic and Pusillanimous" [21, 49]. In using this word, "Pusillanimous", Jimmy also provides the meaning for the audience – "Pusillanimous. Adjective. Wanting of firmness of mind, of small courage, having little mind, mean spirited, cowardly, timid of mind. From the Latin, Pusillus, very little, and animus, the mind." [22].

It is in the use of strong words to describe his wife that the theme of class is best exemplified. Jimmy refers to Alison as "this monument to non-attachment" [21] and all she can say is "God help me, if he doesn't stop, I'll go out of my mind in a minute." [22] Alison perhaps, out of the well-bred nature of her class refuses to be drawn into an argument with Jimmy. However, Luc Gilleman sees her inactions as participatory. He states that "the provocation – withdrawal interaction pattern in *Look Back in Anger* appears to be "complimentary" in that one of the partners reacts with the complimentary behaviour of submission to the verbal attacks of the

other.” [Denison 78]. In fact, Gilleman contends that “Alison’s withdrawal is secret provocation ...” [80]. We suggest that it is out of the good breeding of her class that she refuses to be drawn into the name-calling game with Jimmy. The stage direction gives us a clue into what she is feeling:

*Jimmy watches her, waiting for her to break. For no more than a flash, Allison’s face seems to contort, and it looks as though she might throw her head back, and scream. But it passes in a moment. She is used to these carefully rehearsed attacks, and it doesn’t look as though he will get his triumph tonight .... [22]*

Any friends or family of Alison’s are Jimmy’s “natural enemies” [35] He seems to be friendly with Cliff because they “both come from working people” [30]. He detests even some of his mother’s relatives because they are “posh”. [30]

Jimmy gets as cruel as saying to Alison that “if you could have a child, and it would die,” [37] without knowing that Alison is pregnant. He goes on to liken Alison’s passions to that of a “python”. The “python” symbol according to Emine Tecimer quoting Ibrahim Yerebakan is “a metaphor which encapsulates Jimmy’s fear of female sexual and maternal domination and overwhelming power of a woman.”

Much of the newness *Look Back in Anger* represents can be located in the play’s expression of anger. If one reads the play, watches it on stage or sees the film version, one is struck by the intense anger expressed in it. Unkind words, abusive speech, name calling, vituperations, a constant barrage of hurtful words saturate the play. The major character lashes out at the upper-class which is represented by his wife – “this monument to non-attachment” [21]. In calling her this, he refers to the common view of the English as emotionless or the “thick upper-lip”. He insults and attacks the class to which she belongs. His language is blunt and not subtle. Jimmy is thus shown as vociferous.

Jimmy’s anger stems from his idealism – that man should be more concerned with what goes on around him and be more alive. He bullies everyone in contact with him except those of working-class origins like Mrs Tanner, Hugh and Madeline. He is concerned that people are not paying attention and demands attention by force. He says:

... Nobody can be bothered. No one can rouse themselves out of their delicious sloth. You two will drive me around the bend soon – I know it ... Oh heaven, how I long for a little ordinary human enthusiasm. Just enthusiasm – that’s all. I want to hear a warm, thrilling voice cry out Hallelujah! (*He bangs his heart theatrically*) Hallelujah, I’m alive! I’ve an idea .... [15]

He continues in the same manner:

Why don’t we have a little game? Let’s pretend we are human. (*He looks from one to the other*). Oh brother, it’s such a long time since I was with anyone who got enthusiastic about anything. [15]

Jimmy tries to wake Alison up, and by extension the society, from her ‘sloth’ but she cannot be bothered. He is equally angry that, “Nobody thinks, nobody cares. No beliefs, no convictions

and no enthusiasm” [17]. Through this vehemence, he criticises the attitude of the British. Jimmy also laments the loss of his own world when compared with the Edwardian age represented in this case by Alison’s father. To him, there is nothing in his own age worth celebrating: “... if you’ve no world of your own, it’s rather pleasant to regret the passing of someone’s else’s.” [17].

He criticises the society that gives him an upper-class education but does not provide him the necessary relevance in the society. He refers to his university as “white-tile” not “red-brick”. “White-tile” is an image used to represent newly created universities by the Mass Educational Act of 1944. This welfarist state is attacked by Jimmy Porter. “Red-brick” on the other hand represents Oxford and Cambridge – the Etonian Old School boy tradition which connects with the rich. Banham states Osborne’s criticism most succinctly in the following way: “Osborne’s Jimmy Porter is lost in a world that seems to offer him no clear status and which he certainly does not find funny.” [Banham 2]

Two images of animals dominate the play – the bear and the squirrel. We are introduced to these images right at the beginning of the play. Then we see Jimmy and Alison playing out the roles of bear and squirrel respectively in a moment of their happiness. The “bear-and- the squirrel” image assumes a larger role at the end of the play when Alison returns to Jimmy after losing the baby. The game of bear and squirrel shows Jimmy as the bear and Alison as the squirrel. [47] And it is not “a bit fey” [47] as Helena would want to see it. Rather, it is a way of escape for two of them.

We’ll be together in our bear’s cave, and our  
squirrel’s drey, and we’ll live on honey, and nuts  
.... And we’ll sing songs about ourselves – about  
warm trees and snug caves, and lying in the sun.  
And you’ll keep those big eyes on my fur, and help  
me keep my claws, because I’m a bit of a sippy,  
scruffy sort of a bear. And I’ll see that you keep that  
sleek bushy tail glistening as it should, because  
you’re none too bright either, so we’ve to be  
careful. There are cruel steel traps lying about  
everywhere, just waiting for rather mad slightly  
satanic and very timid little animals. Right? [96].

We have quoted this lengthy ending to the play for very clear reasons. Many critics have commented on this idyllic conclusion as unfavourable. Martin Banham (19... :18) for example states that “the cliché of an ending ... is in many ways an unsatisfactory finale to the play, not because of any lack of feeling that is there, and in a genuine way, in abundance, but more because it is so reminiscent of plays with a great deal less emotional integrity about them than *Look Back in Anger* possesses.” [18]

We observe that the word “Why” is used repeatedly in *Look Back in Anger*. It could be in questions: “Why do I do this every Sunday?” [10], “Why do you bother?” You can’t understand a word of it” [11], “Why don’t we have a little game. Let’s pretend we are human beings” [15], or in a series as in “Why, why, why, why do we let these women bleed us to death?”. [84] By its use Osborne seems to show Jimmy Porter’s frustration at the circumstances of his period. He cannot understand why certain things are allowed to happen.

A good example of a metaphor used in *Look Back in Anger* is when Jimmy refers to Alison’s father as “Poor old Daddy, Just one of those sturdy plants left over from Edwardian

Wilderness” [66]. This is a rather sympathetic view of the Colonel to Jimmy but even in it, his anger is still evident in the use of the word “old”.

Jimmy’s anger at Alison reaches a level of sheer cruelty in the metaphor below:

JIMMY: I want to stand up in your tears, and splash about in them, and sing. I want to be there when you grovel. I want to be there, I want to watch it, I want the front seat.

Jimmy gets his wish at the end when Alison loses the child and comes crawling back.

According to Carter, “... Osborne’s similes are drawn from common sources, history and war amongst others. Jimmy Porter sentimentally recalls his ex-girlfriend Madeline with these words: “JIMMY: To sit on top of a bus with her was *like setting out with Ulysses*” [19].

The words “Looking Back” that form part of the title of the play is used by Alison in retrospect. She could not “think what it was to feel young, really young.” [28] Just as Alison’s retrospective conversation with Helena, is also a means by which we are told of how Alison and Jimmy met.

Another symbol used in the play is “Virginity”. To Jimmy this represents one of the codes of the upper class and that is why he feels trapped by Alison’s.

... And, afterwards; he actually taunted me with my virginity. He was quite angry about it, as if I had deceived him in some strange way. He seemed to think an untouched woman would defile him [30]

To Jimmy too, “anyone who’s never watched somebody die is suffering from as pretty bad case of virginity” [57]. “Virginity” in this case refers to inexperience. Jimmy does not want anything to do with tradition especially those of the upper class. Thus, he becomes irreverent.

The “sweet-stall” where Jimmy works with his friend, Cliff, is the former’s act of trying to identify with the proletarian world that does not agree with the actual university-educated Jimmy. Jimmy does not fit into this role – a university-trained man who could not find a better job other than keeping a sweet-stall.

The purpose of Jimmy’s harsh use of language is to shock. “There is nothing abstruse or *recherché* about Osborne’s language. It is used to arrest and for language to achieve that effect in theatre, as Osborne’s does, even out of context, is a mark of significant success. Of course, brash, strident exaggerated hyperbole will always shock”. [Carter 160]

In this play, Osborne shows his irreverence at the Establishment or tradition with biting rhetoric. His disgust is forceful and direct as shown in Jimmy Porter’s numerous monologues which contain scathing criticism of the establishment. He raves, rages and rants but cannot provide any solution to these ills. However, through the vehemence of his language, he is able to bring to public light the ills of the society.

### **Osofisan’s *The Chattering and the Song***

Although the plot of the play is thin, it however contains very strong statements about the social and political life of the people. It records the anger of its characters against a wicked ruler and his activities. This anger is reified from mere emotion that is destructive and impulse to an intellectual level because the group of enlightened characters come together to form the Farmers’ Movement; a somewhat subversive organisation working against the chicanery of the rulership. They are angry at the situation of things in the land and so have decided to join hands with the poor to effect a change in their social and political life.

The play opens with the courtship dance between Sontri and Yajin. Even in this, we are introduced to the imagery of the oppressed and the oppressor. In re-enacting the “Iwori Otura” riddle upon the plays is built, the audience is shown the imagery of the predator and the prey:

The fish swimming for life the hawk with the beak  
of steel swooping down on the hen... (Osofisan  
1977:1-5)

It is in the “play-within-play” in *The Chattering and the Song* that this imagery is better revealed. The Friends decide to give Sontri and Yajin a wedding present. In other words, the play-within-play is actually put up as a gift for their friend. In this “small” play whose material is taken from history, Alafin Abiodun is rather depicted as a wicked king as against the benevolent image he has in historical records. Osofisan subverts this fact in order to make a point that all governance no matter how benevolent can become malevolent if not checked by the progressive revolutionary groups in the society. In fact, Osofisan states in an interview with Olu Obafemi (1996:175) that there was indeed an opposition to the rulership of Alafin Abiodun.

In the play, Abiodun becomes tyrannical. He and his men “are fed and flourishing” and steal the lands of the poor. Alafin and his men are rich and their “salaries swell from the burden of poor people’s taxes”. His barns are full and bursting while poor people’s children are on the streets begging for food. (Osofisan, 1977:42) Alafin supports his wicked activities with the view of the divine kingship. He hides his evil acts under the influence of the gods. Latoye’s indignation and rage show the king’s irresponsibility:

Latoye:

For centuries, you have shielded yourself with the gods. Slowly, you painted them in your colour, dressed them in your own cloak of terror, injustice and bloodlust... to each of the gods, Edumare gave power and fragility so that none of them shall be a tyrant over the others and none a slave... But in your reign Abiodun, the Elephant eats and nothing remains for the antelope! The buffalo drinks and there is drought in the land! Soldiers seize him, he is ripe for eating. (*The Chattering and the Song* 45)

Aresa supports this “sacrilege” against the gods when he asserts the power of human beings to fashion their gods and throw them away when they become irrelevant:

We worship Osanyin, god of secrets, but if he stands in the path of justice, we shall haul him into then stream. For all those who seek to unbalance the world, to rearrange it according to their own greed, there is only one remedy, Abiodun, Death. (*The Chattering and the Song* 46)

Latoye, seen as an underdog, a rebel and a usurper confronts Alafin Abiodun frontally. He insults the king using invectives and harsh language as shown in the dialogue between him and Alafin Abiodun. While the king resorts to magic to conquer Latoye, Latoye on the other hand utilises reason as against magic. He calls on the guards to reflect on their situation and see themselves as mere underdog used by the king for his wishes. Latoye conscientises the guards to the extent that they are not able to arrest him.

The Alafin has summoned you as he summons his dogs. Bark, he orders you. Bite! And you all leap forward, your fangs bared. But look at me! I am one of you... dog never eats dog... (*The Chattering and the Song* 40)

A significant metaphor used in this play is “the chattering of the weaverbird”. Funlola, the artist sees the birds as noisy so she lets them loose. But Sontri educates her rather painfully that “weaverbirds” do not make noise only bad government does:

A commotion is a violent disturbance

Like a riot  
Or a bad government  
But the chirping of birds  
Is called a song  
And the weaverbirds’ chatter  
In chorus  
And their chattering is song  
(*The Chattering and the Song* 17-18)

Another image of note in the play is “virginity”. This is seen in Sontri’s speech to Yajin. He says “... I take your pretty virgin here before your father, what do you think will be the verdict? ... (18). In this way, Sontri does not only ridicule Yajin’s virginity which he sees as plain ignorance but also her father, the judge.

Anger is revealed in the character and language of Sontri. He is described in “angry” metaphors. Right from the opening stage direction, his actions and person assume violent dimensions: “he enters the stage”, “lunges forward angrily”, “trips, tumbles, and picks himself up”, “crawls”, “swearing”. This angry description is reinforced by Yajin’s comment about him. She describes his eyes as the “colour of blood” (4), “his eyes the shade of red” (5). Sontri, himself sees them as:

The strangled scream of the people, the shout  
suppressed by the power... (4)

Yajin describes Sontri as a “complex personality, sometimes, he’s like a mountain with a volcano inside (11) Sontri “pants with anger” he is

The wild untamed one running with street brats,  
garage touts, and the like and only just managing to  
scale through exams. (13)

Sontri is a restless human being who had tried his hands on many things only to run away from them; from the army, to politics, to imprisonment and after the civil war, he grew “harder, angrier but also more concerned” and he eventually joined the Farmers’ Movement as the songwriter. (13) The dance of the “crawling through”, (one of Sontri’s songs) by the girls is rudely interrupted by the “yell of anger from off stage”, it was Sontri’s angry voice at the discovery of the escape of the weaverbirds and the physical pain he exerts on Funlola as punishment for this reveals another one of his angry dispositions.

Sontri’s language is harsh, full of abuse, insult, invectives and vituperations. This can be seen where he confronts Yajin with the escape of the weaverbirds:

Look my dear, that’s you. Those two soft eyes, soft... and  
blind! And those painted eyelids, those gentle curtains  
nicely cordoned around your sweet romantic dreams while

the world groans around you on wounded wings! Close your windows with curfews of indifference, there'll be white-robe maidens tomorrow to dance up the church steps by your side to the blasted altar and the fat maggot who will be waiting behind it (16 Emphasis Mine)

Sontri's bellicose attack on Yajin's parents is reminiscent only of Jimmy Porter in *Look Back in Anger*. Sontri, like Jimmy, shows no respect for his in-laws to be. He sees only their "smug indifference" to the socio-economic circumstances of the period and especially, Yajin's father's "irresponsible use of state power". Sontri says:

her father is a judge, you know. If you haven't heard of him, then you haven't been breathing. An eminent judge, known and respected from Lagos to Kaura Namoda! Esungboro! The fearful spirit who deals out death penalties with the same ease as a wealthy man deals out fart into the air! Forty-six years on the bench! Dear father did so well, killing off the nation's bad children that to reward him, they're going to put him on the Armed Robbery Tribunal! (18 Emphasis Mine)

Even the escape of the weaverbirds is likened to Yajin's sister's elopement with the permanent secretary and to "recover" his daughter, Yajin's father had to cook up a charge against the permanent secretary and got him retired prematurely (17). This outburst from Sontri is typical of Jimmy's in *Look back in Anger*.

In a series of mimicry, Sontri goes on to ridicule Yajin's father right in her presence. He goes on all fours barking "whoop, whoop" to lend credence to the ridicule.

Both Funlola and Yajin recognize the anger in Sontri. Yajin hopes to tame "the fire in his belly" but she is quickly cautioned by Funlola:

No one can tame a volcano. The anger an gall are too potent within, the moment he opens his mouth they gush out in scalding screams of protest. He himself cannot control it... (22)

Sontri rages, quivers with anger and lashes out but his anger is not malicious or hysterical. It is this that endears him to his audience as he quickly recovers with humour as we can see in the weaverbirds' scene.

Osofisan however, does not provide the motive behind the sudden change of mood noted in Sontri but we must admit Sontri's shout does not alienate him. Even Yajin admits that Sontri is too much a part of her and we find that Funlola who has who has been made to suffer by Sontri cannot resist him. The scene ends with the two singing one of Sontri's songs.

*The Chattering and the Song* is saturated with the word "anger". If we care to know the number of times that anger appears or if we could use numerical analysis, we would say that anger is specifically in about twenty (20) instances in the play:

Angrily; Paints with anger; a volcanic; he grew harder and angrier, enters Sontri, very angry; controlling her anger; flaring up through anger; he is almost hoarse with anger; beside herself with



rage; the anger and the gall, etc (1, 9, 11, 13, 15, 16,  
17, 18, 19, 22)

Unlike conventional plays where individuals rise to heights by their singular efforts and the well being of the society depends on them, Osofisan pitches his tent with the collective effort of the group working together to effect change. Sontri is the artist who writes the Farmers' anthem. However, the unassuming, drunk Leje is actually the leader who recruits new members for the movement. Leje acts under many pseudonyms that the police cannot recognise him so much that when Sontri is arrested, Leje continues the work. According to him:

The police are ignorant. What is a single man in a revolution? Once a movement begins, in the search for justice, it will run its course, with or without those who serve to spark it off... (*The Chattering and the Song* 53)

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have attempted to discover the representation of anger both in the philosophy and dramaturgy of Osborne and Osofisan. We discovered that anger, though a much maligned emotion is delineated in the language of the protagonists of *Look Back in Anger* and *The Chattering and the Song* and it is seen rather as an intellectual, aesthetic form integral to the works of these two playwrights. It is a single-minded pursuit of both Osborne and Osofisan especially in their involvement in creating a better system for their societies. This anger is filtered through art such that it does not "eat the writers up" rather they are angry at structures in the society and through the anger, call for the ills to be corrected. Anger becomes therefore, an interpretive apparatus that enables Osborne and Osofisan to assess the human condition. They attack institutions, verbalise their protests and give vent to their disgust at the corrupt systems that exist in their societies. They respond with angry denunciation of such prevailing circumstances. Anger is an overriding theme and dominant motif that runs through the web of their plays. In both plays, anger is not mild but intense and furious as depicted in the language of the protagonists. The anger is directed in both plays at the government, those in power, and at corrupt leaders.

A significant revelation in both plays is that the socioeconomic problems of the post-war era provided the framework and the basis for the angry drama of Osborne and Osofisan. Both playwrights emerged at times in social evolution when anger was legitimised by the social predominance of Marxist rationalism of inequality. Osofisan for example is more Marxian than Osborne who simply harbours Marxist sentiments.

Both Jimmy and Sontri are restless, angry, brash and irreverent lashing out at their partners in vituperations and abuse. They are alike more the use of the image of virginity employed in both plays. However, while Osborne's anger is not directed at any particular change, Osofisan's is directed at a particular socialist aim. Osborne wants a change in the socioeconomic situations of his time but does not seem to know the alternative to the situation he openly criticises.

Artistic anger finds its physical non-artistic equivalent in the actions of the characters. In Osborne, it is brash, physical and impotent displays while in Osofisan it is also physical but calculated and a motivating force for change. The characters are bold, daring and angry, most often violent physically and verbally. Yet these characters are polarised in both plays into two groups: the camps of the rich and the poor and the struggle between the two represents the main conflict of the two plays. Interestingly, Osofisan's *The Chattering and the Song* is realised in a

web of song, dance and drumming. The songs especially that of the crawling things are integral to the theme of the play whereas Osofisan's *Look back in Anger* is built on the potentials of language. There is a strong dependence on the emotive language and there seems to be no dialogue at all. What emerges is monologue – the powerful concentration on a single character at the expense of the development of the other characters. Osofisan however, places more emphasis on the collective responsibility so that character emerges larger than others. This is in accordance with his belief in collaboration – a belief in the fact that the destiny of the society depends on the actions of the joint effort of the individuals.

In our analysis of the two plays, Osborne is not as vigorous and forceful in his pursuit of the change he craves for in the society. His resolution of the conflict leaves much to be desired whereas Osofisan pursues his conflict to a logical conclusion as seen in *The Chattering and the Song*.

Significantly, both playwrights started a new kind of drama in their countries. Their type of drama shows their angry disposition and is a denunciation of the ills in society and drama in their hands became an instrument for serious discussion and a tool through which the anger of the writer is conveyed and by which they ultimately hope for change.

It is interesting to note that Osborne and Osofisan are two playwrights from two disparate continents who share similar concerns especially their attitude to the problems in their countries. It goes to show that the human condition is the same everywhere. Anger modifies the content, form and vision of their works. It is the urge and motivating force for their writing instincts. The anger we refer to is not mere hysterics or the valorization of violence but one that is mediated or filtered through art- cerebral anger.

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