The Life Review and the (alternative) Politics of Ageing

This paper explores the TV representations of two old women (both in their mid-70s) through the lens of Butler's concept of the life review and the role of reminiscence in old age. I examine two television dramas broadcast in late 1980s Britain. *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* (1988) was broadcast on BBC 1 as a part of the *Talking Heads* (1988) series of monologues written by Alan Bennett, and *She's Been Away* (1989) is a single play written by Stephen Poliakoff broadcast as a part of BBC's *Screen One* anthology series (BBC1 1989-1993). Each places an elderly woman at the centre of a narrative in which memory and reflection illuminate some aspects of this later stage in life and speaks to a culture that largely denies processes of ageing, (and therefore, death). Both dramas will be discussed through the prism of what gerontologist Robert Butler (1975) termed the life review, a process through which the elderly engage in a series of reflections that reposition certain life events, and thus alter perceptions of that life in order to reconcile past disappointments or schisms with close, significant others. In applying his ideas to these two TV dramas, we are offered a view of old age in which the life review can be seen as a part of an ongoing process of becoming in ways that unsettle the narrative of decline that dominates contemporary accounts of ageing and old age (Swinnen 2015).

Before I develop these ideas further I want to draw attention to Diana Athill's most recent memoir, *Alive, Alive Oh! And Other things that Matter* (2015), in which a non-fiction, autobiographical account shares characteristics with the dramatised fictions that I go onto explore. Athill's reflections usefully illuminate the life review practices that underpin Butler's 1975 concept (which will be explained more fully below) and establish a continuity that links Butler's ideas with the two TV dramas from the 1980s.

In a radio interview, Athill describes the pleasure of reflecting on her life from the vantage point of advanced old age, or as the interviewer/presenter Mariella Fostrop puts it, 'a couple of weeks shy of her 98th birthday' (*Open Book* BBC Radio 4, 29 November 2015). What is interesting about this interview is the ways in which it reveals a tension between dominant understandings of vulnerable old age, registered in Fostrop's frequent references to Athill's periodic wheelchair use, as much as a move into a retirement home, and the actuality of Athill's text. Describing her memoirs as celebratory, Athill challenges the equation of old age with debilitation, redundancy, and vulnerability. Indeed, Athill describes her present life as both vivid and pleasurable. During the interview she discusses her delight in having the time and space in which to recount her memories

of the past, the people she has known, the places visited, the men she has slept with, the meals she enjoyed.

Throughout the interview Athill (as the book title *Alive, Alive Oh!* suggests) refuses to describe her memoirs as reflections on the loss of youth and vigour. Rather, Athill insists that she is now at peace with previously long-held sorrows. She says that as a younger woman she tended to dwell on unhappy times, the 'ghastliness' of certain events, whereas she now reframes those times, viewing them in a different light. In particular, and by way of example, she discusses her first love, Tony, who left her 'heartbroken' when he ended their engagement shortly before he was killed in action during WWII. Recently, while packing to move into a retirement home, Athill came across the framed tile Tony had given her on their first Christmas together. In the past, she says, this would have reminded her of how much she misses him. However, 'what this tile represents now is the five years Tony and I were together *before* it went pear-shaped. We had a very, very good time' (*Open Book*). Furthermore, Tony, 'that man', shaped her 'optimistic' perspective on life.

This shift in perception, she says, is possibly 'something to do with being old' (*Open Book*). It is clear that here, as well as in a similar interview for the *Guardian* newspaper (Hadley 2015), Athill is refusing the 'social imaginary of the fourth age' described by Gilleard and Higgs as 'the repository of all the feared and disdained aspects of age and agedness' (2015: 264). The fourth age, an age embodied by the elderly, represents an imagined existence which they liken to 'a metaphorical "black hole" where human agency is no longer visible' (Ibid. 2015: 262). Athill, along with the fictional counterparts discussed below, produces a counter-discourse in which agency is key to defying the social imaginary that positions each subject as abject, as objects of disgust, rendered pitiful, and separated from the rest of society.

The pleasures of ongoing agency and engagement are evident in Athill's account of being old, at the end of life. For example, she describes being pushed around in a wheelchair as 'the most delicious feeling' (*Open Book*), and that nothing 'could be more luxurious than being pushed around a really crowded and thrilling exhibition'(Athill cited in Hadley 2015: 6). Even downsizing to move into a retirement home has held unexpected pleasures as the wrench of parting with treasured possessions has been counterbalanced by the formation of new, unexpected friendships and the 'delight' of being free from domestic responsibilities (Ibid. 2015). Thus, Athill casts her experience of growing old as a period offering new pleasures and greater wisdom (one of the essays in *Alive, Alive Oh!* is entitled 'Lessons'). In short, Athill's current life experiences stand counter to dominant discourses of aging that represent old age as abject and the empty end point of life in which the subject becomes immobilised in a quagmire of loneliness and longing.

The Life Review and Reminiscence

Being the recipient of an O.B.E., Oxford educated, a middle-class publisher and prize-winning author (and white) bestows a privilege that give form and shape to Athill's memories which, along with the economic, social and cultural capital that underpins her comfortable present places her at odds with her fictional counterparts that I discuss below. But, with such differences noted, for now I want to focus on the process of remembering that she articulates in order to argue that her memoir (and interview) corresponds to Butler's formulation of the life review and that these utterances illustrate the significance of that process when it emerges in dramatic form.

Butler argues that, for older people, reviewing one's life is a universal, inner experience that may contribute to late-life disorders, 'particularly depression', but that it can also lead to the evolution of candour, wisdom and serenity (Butler 1975: 486). Rather than seeing life review as a symptom of pathology or as fatuous escapism, Butler contends that the process should be seen as 'the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and, particularly, the resurgence of unresolved conflicts … Presumably this process is prompted by the realization of approaching dissolution and death … It is further shaped by contemporaneous experiences' (Ibid: 487). Indeed, the process may forge new intimacies with close significant others as disclosures of previously unknown truths are revealed. Drawing on Erikson, Butler claims that identity formation does not end with adolescence, but is an ongoing process of the entire life cycle and that the life review plays an active function in an individual's process of becoming.

Butler, as a psychogeriatrician, formulated his ideas within a clinical context. Nonetheless, his ideas can provide us with a useful means for thinking through media discourses of ageing. However, a point of clarification needs to be made at this stage. Kathleen Woodward (1997) draws a distinction between reminiscence and the life review, illuminating a subtle difference between the two.She argues that, as with the life review, reminiscence is a process, but one that is more fragmentary and partial. Crucially for my purposes, Woodward contextualises the process of reminiscence as one that 'necessarily carries within it the figure of companionship, of the social' (Ibid: 2). By this Woodward means that reminiscence is carried out in the presence of another with whom that story is shared; it is less analytical than the life review, but is a process that nonetheless is 'generative or restorative'(Ibid: 3). The difference between the life review and reminiscence is an important one then, and is key to my discussion of the form that the two dramas take. While in *She's Been Away* Lillian (Peggy Ashcroft) undergoes the life review as an internal process so that we are not the interlocutor, Doris (Thora Hird) in *A Cream Cracker Under the Settee* talks directly to us, the viewer, drawing us into her world through a series of reminiscences that place us as the social other with

whom those memories are shared. The fragments of memories not only give shape to Doris as a character, the act of her reminiscences offer a sociality to the process. Arguably, as I will elaborate, it is this sociality that leads to Doris's final decision, one which operates as a movement towards self-determination and resistance in the face of loss, alienating social change and the regulating (albeit well-meaning) forces of a welfare state. Similarly to Athill's testimony discussed above, *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* and *She's Been Away* articulate the fine distinction between reminiscence and the life review, two aspects of the same process that frequently occur in late age.

TV drama in 1980s Britain

Social policy and the meaning of 'the public' on public services and broadcasting during the Thatcher years and its impact on TV drama in 1980s Britain, has been well documented so will not be rehearsed here (Holland 2013; Wilson 2012). However, some context will help to situate *A Cream Cracker* and *She's Been Away*, politically as well as historically. During the 1980s television broadcasting in the UK underwent significant changes that included technological developments and the advent of Channel 4 which came on air in 1982 with the remit to be edgy, more innovative than the existing broadcasting status quo, and to reflect a wider diversity of voices. According to David Rose this was a time of the most radical change in television since the 'advent of colour and the ability to record tape' (Brandt 1993: xvi). Conversely, and presenting something of a tension, the deregulation and free market philosophies of the Thatcher government put pressure on the BBC to become more commercially minded. This is a period when, as Brandt says, the post-war consensus 'screeched to a halt', the language of libertarianism acting as a cover for reversing social gains of the previous three decades: the free market = freedom (Ibid:9). However, programme makers and writers were also mounting a challenge to, and a commentary on, the rugged individualism that served to undermine public service ideals. 'Writers were trying to get at the darkness, the social cruelty and suffering behind the numbingly neo-bright phrases – the right to choose...' (Ibid: 9). So, despite the invigorating impact of Channel 4 on the British broadcasting landscape, the decline of the single play - the vehicle seen as the best means for posing difficult questions - accelerated during the 1908s; production costs and the battle for ratings made radical dramas difficult to commission. Despite these external cultural and social policy pressures, *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* and *She's Been Away* exemplify the desire to make television that offers a political intervention. As such, the dramas should be considered radical in that each have at the centre, an old woman (which is radical enough) whose recollections expose the impact of sociopolitical change on an individual

rendered dependent and redundant, while also situating old age as a continuing process, a process of revaluation and of becoming, rather than an experience of utter decline.

A Cream Cracker under the Settee

Positioning Alan Bennett's work as politically contentious may be seen as a bit of a stretch. As Richard Scarr says, Bennett is not usually thought of as a political writer, and often is cited alongside 'polite, educated, middle-class writers producing "nice", well-made, intelligent theatre'(1996: 309). In a similar vein, Albert Hunt (1993) describes the *Talking Heads* series as 'gossip turned into drama' but further qualifies this by arguing that gossip, or a gossipy tone, is employed 'as an antidote to official reality. It confronts the grand and the abstract with the particular' (Hunt: 23-24).

A Cream Cracker under the Settee is an example of the particular confronting the grand and the abstract. It is the final drama in the *Talking Heads* series of six monologues, and features Doris, a widow described as being 'in her seventies' (Bennett 1988: 82). Playing younger than her actual age of 77, the role of Doris earned the 1989 BAFTA award for best actress for Thora Hird. The play initially takes place in the living room and then, later, the hallway of Doris' semi-detached house; it opens with her sitting at an awkward angle on a low chair rubbing her leg following a fall that occurred as she tried to dust. Throughout the 30 minutes of screen time, Doris talks directly to us , the intimate tone and looks to camera drawing us into her space as her reminiscences construct the framework of her quiet, uneventful life while she also undertakes a process of reflection that ultimately explains and allows her a final act of defiance when she chooses death rather than life in a care home. As Doris talks to us, she (outwardly at least) appears unaware of the inner life she is revealing, but is nonetheless illuminating the emotional and social limitations placed on this working class widow who appears to have neither family or friends in her landscape. At least, what we see are glimpses into a life defined as being in the fourth age, regulated by social services and constructed by traditional gender and class positions – unlike the middle class Aphill, there is no one to take her to art exhibitions (in or out of a wheelchair). Shot in medium close-up, Doris brings us into her present as she complains about Zulema, her home help, who she sees as no help at all, and a threat to her independence 'I should never have tried to dust. Zulema says to me every time she comes, "Doris. Do not attempt to dust"'. This, along with the establishing shot that includes the fallen stool and wedding photograph on the floor, the patterned net curtains at the window, brown patterned carpet and brown furniture, constructs a domestic *mise-en-scene* in which Doris is trapped within an old-fashioned and rather dreary existence. Recalling Zulema's words on her last visit, Doris is reminded that she is '"on trial here, [for being on her own]. For not behaving sensibly [by cleaning with her Ewbank]. For not acting like a woman of 75 who has a pacemaker and has dizzy spells and

doesn't have the sense she was born with"'. Zulema further threatens her '"What you don't understand, Doris, is that I am the only person that stands between you and Stafford House. I have to report on you"'.

This is not a reminiscence of a past shared experience being recounted with a social other, but it is a gossipy fragment that draws us in as her intimates separating us from Zulema and her alliance with the state apparatus symbolised through the restrictive and controlling directives. So Doris dusts and cleans despite Zulema's commands. But this defiance also confirms Zulema's observations that Doris is not behaving sensibly; her determination to dust results in a fall and her subsequent incapacity. Now Doris is on the floor with a leg that has 'gone to sleep', unable to move, to reach for the kettle, or to make herself comfortable. Looking at her fallen wedding photo with its now-cracked glass, Doris reflects that 'We're cracked, Wilfred'.

Immobile and infuriated by the sound of the garden gate banging, Doris identifies the broken 'sneck' as the cause - 'it's wanted doing for years' - its repair never achieved by her late husband, Wilfred. As if the broken gate is not enough to worry about, Doris is now anxious about the how messy the falling leaves (not her leaves, but those of next-door) will make her front garden look: 'I ought to put a note on the gate. "Not my leaves"'. The recollection triggers others that reveal Doris' desire for control rubbed uncomfortably against Wilfred's more relaxed disposition. This, along with subsequent reminiscences of similar tensions, builds a snapshot of their lives together: Wilfred's desire for a dog, Doris' refusal on the grounds that they are dirty; Wilfred's insistence on having a shrub in the front garden when Doris wanted it all concreted over. Memories of her dead husband and their life together are woven with recollections of the now-deceased neighbours who have been replaced with strangers. Reminiscence of a time when neighbours and their daily habits were known, along with her now-redundant disagreements with Wilfred, produces a melancholy, a sense that the best (and it was never that great) is over. The melancholic affect of Doris's intimate reflections is consolidated when elegiac piano music is heard as the screen fades to black.

Next, we see Doris sitting on the hall floor, her back against the front door, the wedding photo beside her. She has made an attempt to reach the door, to open it and call for help. Her inability to save herself here is the catalyst for the shift from fragmented reminiscences to a process that we can recognise as the life review. Although still a fragmentary snapshot of a moment in time, what is revealed next is evidently a life-determining moment. Talking to us from her position on the hall floor, Doris tells us that, 'This is where we had the pram. You couldn't get past for it. Proper prams, then … Not these fold up jobs. You were proud of your pram. Wilfred spotted it in the *Evening Post.* I said, "Don't let's jump the gun, Wilfred." He said, "At that price? This is a chance of a lifetime"'. That

particular lifetime, the anticipation of a future that included a child, was not to be. Among expressed irritations about non bona fide callers selling religion, carpet sales, minicabs, Doris recalls the death of her baby boy, and the equally devastating responses from the midwife and Wilfred:

> I wanted the baby called John. The midwife said he wasn't fit to be called anything and had we any newspapers? Wilfred said, "Oh yes. She saves newspaper. She saves shoe boxes as well." I must have fallen asleep because then I woke up she was gone. I wanted to see him. Wrapping him in newspaper as if he were dirty. He wasn't dirty, little thing. I don't think Wilfred minded. … "We're better off, Doris. Just the two of us." It was then he started talking about getting a dog. If it had lived I might have grandchildren now. Wouldn't be in this fix.

The large pram, in which Doris had pride, and its subsequent redundancy, stand in for the unfulfilled promise along with the suggestion that her life was/is as empty as the hall that it once occupied. Doris' talk continues, a blend of the trivial with the profound – 'I've had this frock for years. A lame woman ran it up for me that lived down Tong Road … I've got umpteen pillowcases, some we got given when we were first married. Never used. And the blanket I knitted for the cot. All its little coats and hats'. A narrative of loss appears to lead to the realisation that THIS IS IT, that this is the sum total of her life. Eating the cream cracker she finds on the floor, destroying 'the evidence' that she has defied Zulema by attempting to clean, Doris returns to her present.

> We were always on our own, me and Wilfred… Mix. I don't want to mix. Comes to the finish and they suddenly think you want to mix. I don't want to be stuck with a lot of old women. All smell of pee. And daft half of them, banging tambourines. You go daft there [Stafford House], there's nowhere else to go but daft. Wearing somebody else's frock. They mix up your teeth there. I am H.A.P.P.Y. I am not H.A.P.P.Y. I am un-H.A.P.P.Y. Or I would be.

The present contrasts with a past that she perceives as friendlier and cleaner – 'the streets were clean and it was all clean and you could walk down the street and folks smiled and passed the time of day … all them years ago when we were first married and I was having the baby'. Such rememberings constitute Doris's life review with the result that she refuses to succumb to pressures of the state and the terrors of Stafford House. Despite both her legs now being numb and useless, potential rescue in the form of a concerned policeman knocking at her door asking if she is alright is declined. She has already made her decision. Imagining a conversation with some authority or other, she says "Right. Pack your case. You belong in Stafford House". Then, 'A home. Not me. No fear'. After assuring the policeman that she is alright, she says to herself, 'You've done it now, Doris. Done it now, Wilfred'. We are left with a tight close-up of Doris' face as the light fades.

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Andrew Blaikie (1999) argues that in much social history, older people are often object of the gaze of politicians, medical practitioners and reformers rather than being seen as speaking subjects. Bennett's devise of the monologue allows Doris to become a speaking subject in which the cultural politics of old age are made manifest. Her talk offers a kaleidoscope of social change and personal reminiscence that brings the position of the aged of a certain class in 20th century Britain into view. The swirl of talk encompasses the present in which Zulema's watchful eye stands in for the state apparatus ready to whisk old people out of sight and into an undignified, dehumanising existence (or, at least, that is how Doris imagines it), along with 'carpet sales in chapels now, or Sikhs', and neighbours who no longer know each other. So Doris, and we as her social companions, can see that she is in a place out of time. Nonetheless, it is the reflections of her lost baby that pitches this monologue from one of gossipy reminiscences to that of the life review. And it is in this turn that Doris exercises agency by deciding her own fate, and by extension, passes on her knowledge of the changing world and the experience of ageing within it.

As Blaikie says, 'personal narratives will be meaningless unless they are validated by their listeners' (Ibid: 212). What makes the transfer of knowledge and experience particularly problematic for older generations, Blaikie argues, is that their accounts 'are by definition "anachronistic" since they derive from what has been learnt by past [redundant] experience' (Ibid: 213). However, Bennett's strategy of continually moving Doris' voice between past and present - the banging gate, the dead baby boy wrapped in newspaper, the unswept leaves - resists redundancy, and we see the social landscape from Doris's perspective: churches are for carpet sales, old people get shunted off into homes where 'they mix up people's teeth', and most notably, her choice to live alone is scrutinised and 'reported on'.

'I think in terms of the edge of tragedy and the edge of comedy, because I always think that's the best place to be…' (Bennett cited in McKechnie 2007:190). *A Cream Cracker under the Settee* creates such an edge, such a liminality, that allows audiences an affective engagement with Doris. Her talk is shot through a series of close ups and tight close-ups that give an intimate connection with her character, and which is punctuated with sequences of long takes that give us time to take in, understand and absorb her world view. The series of reminiscences create an emotional realism through which we connect with this elderly woman so that we, as her social partners, do not cast her talk as meaningless ramblings of no use nor relevance. In fact, it is the emotional realism, the emotional connection that Doris's talk engenders, that counteracts the lack of economic and cultural capital that may otherwise threaten the legitimacy, seriousness and acceptability of her story. Furthermore, the emotional connection engendered works to refute the slide towards fourth age

abjection. Instead, the churn of past and present brings Doris' life into focus; the fact that this will lead to her life's end is not the point. The point is that the life review is not an expression of redundancy; rather, it is a process in which the subject is engaged in a dynamic activity.. Thus, we are able to empathise with Doris's final act of defiance. In *Cream Cracker*, Doris creates a still centre, a liminal space, illuminating the life/lives of women of a certain age and class, and for whom the world has moved (on). And this, I would argue, is a political statement that offers a reflection on aspects of social life and, arguably, an example of how TV writers aimed to illustrate 'the darkness, the social cruelty' (Brandt Ibid: 9) of existence for the alienated elderly person in 1980s Britain. Thus, unlike Athill, whose social position automatically bestows authority (and therefore much less likelihood to be positioned as abject), the mode through which we are privy to Doris' reflections make her experiences an equivalent with the non-fictional account offered from the elite social position occupied by Athill.

She's Been Away

Whilst Doris' life review leads her to refuse the 'help' that would lead to decline into a world of mixed up teeth and wearing someone else's frock, Lillian's life review in *She's Been Away* has the opposite result. The play is concerned with how Lillian reconstructs the picture of her life and, as a consequence, is reborn. As In *Cream Cracker, She's Been Away* places Lillian, also in her 70s, at the centre of the narrative. The play opens with Lillian being ejected from the psychiatric hospital in which she has lived for more than 60 years. Her enforced leaving is due to the closure of the hospital, a reflection of governmental policy in 1980s Britain to move mental health care into the community. Sent to live with her closest family, nephew Hugh (James Fox), his wife Harriet (Geraldine James) and their young son Dominic (Jackson Kyle), Lillian finds herself in a strange environment in which she, in turn, is a strange uncomfortable presence. Interestingly, here, it is not Lillian's lack of social capital that is the source of disjunction– she is a member of an upper middle class family, whose wealth and social position are embodied in her nephew, and made emblematic by the (very grand) family home which she frequented as a young girl and where she now resides following life in a psychiatric hospital. Diminished by both her age and her 'madness', her years of being 'away', Lillian occupies an abject position in which her fourth age obliterates any possibility of cultural capital.

As I argue in full elsewhere (Wilson 2014), with Lillian mostly mute the family struggle to accommodate, to integrate, the 'mad' old woman into their daily lives, so that the drama hinges on the conflicting perceptions of each family member to whom she remains a mystery (a mystery to the male members of the family, at least). However, viewers are afforded a privileged position of having

access to Lillian's back-story delivered by means of a series of flashbacks through which we learn why the young Lillian (Rebecca Pigeon) was deemed 'mad' and hospitalised. We see a young Lillian marked as unruly, as her argumentative defiance and expressions of sexual desire refuse to conform to constructions of restrictive traditional femininity and ultimately result in her pathologisation. The flashbacks that narrate Lillian's story also give insights into the process of becoming as she integrates disparate, confusing, and painful memories into a coherent subjectivity. This can be usefully illustrated through the first of the many flashbacks that occur in the drama.

The family, to which she is returned, have inherited and live in Lillian's childhood home. It is a large, rather grand house that befits Hugh's status of a successful City financier, and is the stage for the party thrown to celebrate Hugh and Harriet's tenth wedding anniversary, Lillian's return, and Harriet's second pregnancy. The party is a lavish affair in which many of the guests are those who knew Lillian before she was hospitalised sixty years earlier. Through a series of point-of-view shots we see the party from Lillian's perspective as the rooms swirl with close-ups of faces eating the extravagant food, staring at Lillian, drinking champagne, talking. Harriet's announcement that there are, 'Lots of people are here to meet you. They're all ready, queuing up', is followed by a tight close-up of a smiling woman who asks: 'You don't remember me, do you? Matilda. Do you remember? You came to stay with me, in Corsham. When I was a gal. We quarrelled the whole time'.

Many similar encounters delivered through point-of-view shots are disorienting, effectively placing us in Lillian's position as object of pity, curiosity and nervousness. The intensity of these encounters is uncomfortable, but it is the sight of Edward (Leslie Goodall) and his brother Thomas (Edgar Goodall), seen at a distance that triggers the first recollection. The scene shifts in time back to a similar party in the same house where the young Lillian is standing outside with young Edward (Barnaby Holm) and young Thomas (René Zagger) demanding, 'Edward. Tell your brother to go away.' Thomas barely has time to leave before Lillian is pulling at Edward's clothes. As she unbuttons his shirt, she stuffs a letter inside: 'Read this later. You won't be able to sleep.' We then cut to the scene where Lillian is bouncing on a settee in a state of delirium swinging her arms as she tunelessly sings: 'There's a rainbow round my shoulder and a sky of blue above. Oh, the sun shines bright, the world's alright, 'cos I'm in love.' Next we see Lillian back outside the party, kissing Edward, tugging at his coat and clothes – 'Edward. Edward. Go away Thomas!'. This scene is followed by one in which a rain-drenched and (presumably) post-coital Lillian returns to the gathering (the same gathering? It is not clear). All eyes are on the dishevelled Lillian as she circulates the room among the dancing couples, smirking as she goes. We then shift to a scene – the same night? Another night? – where the family is gathered. 'Edward! Edward! Just look at me!'. On the

floor, prostrate, Lillian is holding onto Edward's legs shouting: 'I am going to make to make you look at me. Edward! Edward! Why are you doing this to me? Tell me why!'. As Edward attempts to extricate himself Lillian stands and begins to smash objects shouting: ' Edward! Edward! Don't go! Stay here!'. We cut, abruptly, to the present day party where old Edward glances in Lillian's direction but does not speak to her. Lillian, for her part, mutters to herself that she doesn't know which of the brothers is Edward: 'Can't tell them apart now anyway.' This indicator of indifference is interesting because it suggests a separation between past trauma and present situation is opening up a space within which the life review and subsequent integration of self is made possible.

The series of flashbacks take place during this night of the present-day party, signalling the beginning of the process of reliving and reviewing past experiences. The play moves us continually back and forth in time, each movement backwards revealing more of Lillian's past, culminating in the longest and most expository flashback. Throughout the play, all flashbacks are interwoven with present day experiences, and because they are represented in sepia tones they are clearly marked off as being from a different time, whilst their dark colour palate combines with extra-diegetic elegiac music in the production of a linking continuity between Lillian's review of individual events that includes the final, extended flashback of her committal to hospital. The cumulative effect of this continuity is that we grow to understand Lillian as she develops an understanding of herself. In Butler's terms, this is her life review during which the chaos of the past makes a certainty of the present and thus enables Lillian to take a final rebellious act in which she exercises agency and stands as a fully coherent subject.

She's Been Away culminates with the now heavily pregnant Harriet being rushed into the hospital theatre for a life-saving caesarean delivery. The authority embodied in the medical and nursing staff trigger the most profound memory yet, one that is simultaneously the most traumatic and, ultimately, the most liberating. Lillian's relationship with Harriet, based on an unspoken but nonetheless powerful bond between the two women, is also an important element of the life review process. The bond that develops is premised on the mutual recognition that both women have been/are suffocated by cultural strictures that limit female expressions of selfhood. I discuss this relationship in more depth elsewhere (Ibid: 2014), however, for my purposes here, I want to focus on the ways in which Lillian consolidates the fragments of memory to form what we can recognise as the life review, and the process through which she moves from object of abjection to integrated subject.

As she struggles to join Harriet in the operating theatre, Lillian is manhandled away from the entrance. We watch as Lillian is led away from the room when we are shown a tight close up of a

male hand gripping her wrist. The restrictive hand on Lillian's arm triggers the most expository flashback/memory of the play, suturing us into Lillian's back-story. Following the violence of committal, the sequence juxtaposes alternating images of young and old Lillian being restrained in hospital; scenes of Lillian prevented from being with Harriet; and the young Lillian screaming through the bars of a cell-like hospital room. Ultimately young and old Lillians merge, and in the present, the newly unified woman soliloquises, "What happened to all that time? It was just...taken...away" (ellipses in original).

The closing six minutes of the play are enacted in the postoperative room in which Harriet is recovering and the newly self-empowered Lillian takes charge. When refused entry by a nurse she pushes her aside, exclaiming, 'Oh rubbish' and we understand that a profound shift has occurred. Barricading the door so that "they" cannot get in, echoes of the elegiac memory music play over images of a standing Lillian vigilantly guarding a recovering Harriet. The camera pulls back to reveal Lillian and Harriet behind a wall of glass, sharing the space that separates them from authority and from us. As we look at them, we hear footsteps approaching the room. This is the sound of the as yet unseen Hugh approaching. Now, as the sound of footsteps increase, a succession of shot/ reverse shots switch our points of view between that of Lillian looking down the corridor and that of the approaching threat. These shots merge with a series of memories of young Lillian looking through the bars of her own hospital cell/room, jumping in ecstasy on her bed, having sex with Edward, her unruly presence at her parents' party. All are overlaid with the sound of the footsteps while the faint snatches of the elegiac music blur the boundary between past and present and reunites Lillian with her young, pre-hospitalised, defiantly liberated self. Finally, when Hugh comes into view, he is seen marching down the corridor with a fleet of medical and nursing staff in his wake (Hugh is a very influential man after all), his feet echoing and reproducing the rhythm of the old clock in young Lillian's memory - tick-tocking the years away. As the play comes to an end, we are left with Hugh and the newly restored Lillian staring at one another through the glass.

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She's Been Away is, then, another example of the ways in which TV writers aimed to expose the dark underbelly of 1980s Britain. The enforced 'rehabilitation' of former long-term hospital patients was not always a happy or successful experience as hospital had become home to many, and the community resources often did fall short of the need for those discharged. *She's Been Away* offers a critique of this policy as well as simultaneously providing a commentary on the ways in which psychiatry was/is used as an instrument of control that echoes critiques by Lang and Foucault (REFS needed). Additionally, Poliakoff's drama is also explicitly feminist in its critique of a stifling and

controlling patriarchy - evidenced by Hugh's regulation of his wife's behaviour and complete incomprehension of Lillian as a complex, multi-faceted subject. However, it is the life review that forms the shape and direction of the narrative revealing the ways in which, as Butler suggests, the process can lead to 'the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences' (Ibid: 487). Further, the agency that is provoked in Lillian by and through the life review stands counter to the social imaginary of the fourth age and transforms her from abject object to empowered subject.

Overall, I argue that *She's Been Away* and *A Cream Cracker Under the Settee* move old women from the margins to the centre of the narrative, and that both depict old woman as empowered *because* of a long life lived. As Patricia Mellencamp observes, 'age is mistaken for *only* biology', and is related to 'economics and power' so that women, as they age, 'move to the margins of power' (Mellencamp 1992, 281) (emphasis in original). This is especially important for the fictional Doris and Lillian who, unlike the privileged non-fictional Diana Athill, had either never possessed cultural capital or lost it through institutionalised abjection. Despite differences in social positioning in the fictional and non-fictional accounts discussed here, old age allows for affirmative life reviews that enable reconciliation with the past whilst holding the potential for seeing the self as a renewed subject. The outcomes of these renewed subjectivities are variable: ongoing *joie de vivre* for Athill, death for Doris and an undetermined future for Lillian. Yet, uniformly, these subjects are in control of their lives and deaths because of the life review process. Despite their aesthetic and narrative differences, each drama discussed here illuminates the construction of old age as pathological, but simultaneously, that discourse is powerfully undermined through access to the reminiscences and life review processes of Doris and Lillian in ways that chime with Athill's memoirs. The fictional women's reflections provide a liminal space drawing the audience into their respective inner worlds and developing an intimacy with the audience as they reflect, review and, consequently, undergo identity development. Ultimately, this is a process which stands counter to pathologising dominant discourses about ageing and end of life and which reveals the life affirming value of old age.

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