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Downton Abbey: a Cultural Phenomenon. History for the Many

Abstract

This article discusses Downton Abbey, the most popular series in the history of British television. The series is a means of bringing history to the many and thus an important feature of collective cultural memory. Based on the premise that television series such as Downton Abbey are the primary means by which people learn about history today and that they play a major part in determining how the heritage and identity of England and Englishness have been understood, this article discusses why Downton Abbey is so popular, identifying seven primary reasons: the coherence of the historical setting and the characters; the current interest in country estates; the accessibility of the series to all generations; the modern tempo; the equal focus on the aristocratic members of the Crawley family and their servants; the attention to historical detail; and the prominence given to World War One as a catalyst for social and intellectual change. Special focus is placed on the historical context and the impact of World War One, as these are the most important and tangible reasons for the enormous popularity and success of Downton Abbey both on television and in literature.

Keywords: Downton Abbey, World War One, literature, television, England, Englishness, memory

With over 120 million viewers around the world, Downton Abbey is the most popular series in the history of British television[1] . It holds a Guinness World Record for the highest critical review ratings of any television show. Based on the premises that television series such as Downton Abbey are a major part of the collective cultural memory and play a determining role in how the heritage and identity of England and Englishness have been perceived and understood, this article explores why Downton Abbey is so popular, focusing on seven features of the series as these are

exemplified on the screen as well as in literature: the coherence of the historical setting and the characters; the current interest in country estates; the accessibility of the series to all generations; the modern tempo; the equal focus on the aristocratic members of the Crawley family and their servants[2] ; the attention to historical detail; and the prominence given to World War One as a catalyst for social and intellectual change[3] . Each of these reasons is supported by references to literary works related to the series. These works greatly enhance our understanding and appreciation of Downton Abbey. The main focus is on the historical setting and World War One as it is these two features that have contributed most strongly and tangibly to the success of the series.

Television history

Television is the primary means by which people today learn about history. Downton Abbey is an important part of this process. As Gary Edgerton and Peter Rollins argue, “just as television has profoundly affected and altered every aspect of contemporary life – from the family to education, government, business, and religion – the medium’s nonfictional and fictional portrayals have similarly transformed the way tens of millions of viewers think about historical figures and events” (1). To this may be added that Downton Abbey plays a major part in determining “how the heritage and identity of England and Englishness have been understood” (Higson 1). While Higson is not discussing Downton Abbey specifically, his comments are pertinent to the present discussion. The heritage of England and Englishness, argues Higson, includes splendid period costume, luxurious country-house settings, and picturesque landscapes of England. All these features are lavishly represented in Downton Abbey.

Not all critics extol the virtues of television history, of course. Raymond Williams, for example, argues that televisual discourse “flows by” viewers without context or opportunity for retention[4] ; others, including Stephen Heath, claim that television produces forgetfulness and not memory, flow, or history (267-302). Mary Ann Doane goes so far as to argue that television annihilates memory and thus history because it stresses the “newness” of its own discourse (222-239). These arguments are based on Fredric Jameson’s contention that postmodern culture, of which television

is a part, increasingly "derealises" presence, identity, and history (112). This is not the standpoint of the present writer.

The following discussion of Downton Abbey is based on the view that history as it is presented on television and very particularly in such series as Downton Abbey plays a significant role in cultural memory and the popular negotiation of the past not least because it produces history for the many as opposed to the specialized academic history written for the few (Hanna 2).[5] Television has, as Astrid Erll points out, "a tendency to personalize history . . .; it creates intimacy and immediacy, which involves viewers in the historical matters represented" (139). People consume and process televized histories within a web of individual and cultural forces that influence their reception and the uses to which they are put. As Patrick Wright demonstrates, memory, cultural forms, and the appearance of places are remembered and processed in relation to ideologies that work to establish a consensus view of the past that is perceived as significant and memorable (196-203). As Maurice Hallbwachs has demonstrated, individual memories and perceptions are interpenetrated by collective influences, of which television is one of the most important today (21). These influences fill in gaps and ascribe significance to lived experiences. As television repeats scenes and ideas, these are not only identified by the viewer but also re-evaluated in the light of new insights and changing circumstances in the viewer's life.

Downton Abbey in literature

Downton Abbey has prompted the publication of a number of books on, for example, the setting of the series, filming on location and in studios, and its philosophy.[6] Among the publications can be mentioned the Countess of Carnarvon's Lady Almina and the Real Downton Abbey (2011) and Lady Catherine and the Real Downton Abbey (2013), Jessica Fellowes and Matthew Sturgis's The Chronicles of Downton Abbey (Official Series Three TV tie-in, 2012) and The World of Downton Abbey (2011);[7] Jessica Long's Downton Abbey. Your Backstage Pass to the Era and Making of the TV Series (2014), Emma Rowley's Behind the Scenes at Downton Abbey. The Official Companion to All Four Series (2013), J. P. Sperati and Sabine Schreiner's Downton Abbey on Location. An Unofficial Review & Guide to the Locations Used (2013)[8] and Sarah Warwick's

Upstairs & Downstairs. The Illustrated Guide to the Real World of Downton Abbey. Very recently, two more publications have entered the market: Justyn Barnes's Downton Abbey. Rules for Household Staff (2014) and Jessica Fellowes's A Year in the Life of Downton Abbey (2014). Both publications, as their titles suggest, focus on social history. It is a measure of the popularity of the series that after only three years it has already given rise to a literary parody,[9] Chris Kelly's Downton Tabby. A Parody (2013) and a novel, Wendy Wax's While We Were Watching Downton Abbey (2013).[10] The complete scripts for the first two seasons, written and edited by the creator, Julian Fellowes, are also available.[11] These are referenced here where relevant. All these works provide illuminating details about the social and historical context of the story as well as insights into the making and reception of the series.

Julian Fellowes defines the philosophy of the series as follows:

> *We were presenting this very structured, class-conscious society, but at the same time we would deal with all the characters within it with equal weight. We would make an assumption that most of them were trying to live the best lives they could, given the hand they had been dealt with. I think that that sense of ordinary, non-heroic characters nevertheless being decent people who are trying to do their best is the central philosophy of Downton. (qtd. in Rowley 16)*

This article, while incorporating the above ideas, attaches particular importance to changes brought about by World War One. The first stage direction, describing the location, is very significant: "April 1912 – The sun is rising behind Downton Abbey, a great and splendid house in a great and splendid park. So secure does it appear that it seems as if the way of life it represents will last for another thousand years. It won't" (Julian Fellowes, Season One 2). Fellowes explains the following in his footnote to the stage direction:

> *Knowing as we did that the series, if it was going to run at all, would trace the decline of this particular class there seemed to be a nice irony in choosing a house that was so confident of their worth and value, and you get this from the first moment you arrive, when you enter the great atrium hall to find the coats of arms of every bride reaching all the way up the ceiling. (3)*

Kelly's parody of Downton Abbey (in which the characters are cats), picks up on this idea: "Here in this pretty world, gallantry took its last bow. . . . Here was the last ever to be seen of knights and their ladies fair, of master and of servant. . . . Look for it only in coffee-table books, for it is no more than a dream remembered" (n. pag.). Downton Abbey commemorates a time gone by and a major war that changed the shape of the world forever. World War One was not only the great military and political event of its time; it was "also the great imaginative event. It altered the ways in which men and women thought not only about war but also about the world, and about culture and its expressions" (Hynes ix). Downton Abbey incorporates as well as embodies the imagination of the period immediately before, during and after the War.

The literary works that both stimulated and responded to the television series owe their popularity to the television series itself. All the works referenced here are available at reputable book shops and online. Since the 1960s, the media have played an important role in framing how we view the early 20th century, thereby broadening, as the earlier mentioned Emma Hanna has argued, "the public space of remembrance in contemporary British culture" (1).[12] Television is a new form of history that must be judged by what it sets out to do and by the level on which it operates.[13] Through its investigation of the wider anthropological meaning of the networks of attitudes, values, and practices of human societies, it makes an important contribution to cultural history.[14] Downton Abbey is no exception as it makes clear why Edwardian society had to disappear, what role World War One played in this process, and how it affected all classes, from servants to aristocrats. As one historian has noted, "The First World War remains etched in the popular imagination as a futile and pointless conflict which achieved little and cost the nation dearly" (Robb 225). Downton Abbey provides a more balanced view of the impact of the War, showing not only the negative but also some of the positive changes that it triggered. In the year of the centenary of the outbreak of World War One, the series has a very special resonance, particularly in Great Britain.

Like all histories, Downton Abbey has been the object of some criticism. Some of the most important negative appraisals are discussed in Julian Fellowes's footnotes to the complete scripts. They relate primarily to details about customs, clothing, and dining habits.[15] While Fellowes acknowledges that some mistakes have been made, he also points to the willingness of critics to find fault even where fault does not exist. In the complete script to season two, for example, he

emphasizes that the criticism that Matthew would not be able to stand up after apparently breaking his back (the result of a war wound) is unjustified: nowhere is it explicitly stated that Matthew has broken his back; in fact, he has "merely" bruised it. Fellowes concludes that, "The glee with which the papers greet a genuine mistake is sad enough, but when, as here, they deliberately pretend that the show is wrong when it is not, it can be really depressing" (Julian Fellowes, Season Two 388).

In the following discussion, the above-mentioned seven main features contributing to the enormous popularity of Downton Abbey are explored individually, though it should be emphasized that they are connected and mutually dependent. The details of the seven features are explored in the literary works arising from the series; these are thus of great importance to the ensuing discussion. With respect to the first feature – the coherence of the setting and characters – Gareth Neame, one of the executive producers, likens Downton Abbey to a "precinct", that is to say, a clearly defined and delimited space or community. It comprises two communities: above and below stairs. In the series, as in the real world, there is little movement between the two "precincts": only the butler (Mr Carson) and Mrs Hughes (the housekeeper) consult with the master and mistress on the day-to-day running of the house. In reality, most servants who worked below stairs only performed their duties above stairs when their master and mistress were either in bed or not in the house.

As Emma Rowley points out, viewers of Downton Abbey see one precinct at a time (see "Filming at Highclere Castle" in Rowley 34-57). While the furnishings change from season to season, characters maintain their special positions, perform the same tasks, and make use of the same props – be they kitchen utensils or elegant sofas. The viewer quickly becomes familiar with the layout of the different rooms in the house; this gives pleasure and creates a feeling of being "at home". The familiarity of the layout also influences our expectations of what can, or indeed should, happen in the different parts of the house. The features of the rooms above stairs are described in detail in Jessica Fellowes's The World of Downton Abbey (168-97).

The actors in the present, fifth season are largely the same as those appearing in the first season in 2010. Rob James-Collier (first footman Thomas Barrow), for example, comments, "I always remember Liz Trubridge [Executive Producer] saying to me in the first week that as she watched us on the monitor it was like we'd been here for years. They were ecstatic that we all bonded so

well, because it creates a realistic chemistry on scene" (Rowley 73). As Emma Rowley argues, the actors have "developed their own rhythms on set" (251). Hugh Bonneville (Lord Grantham) and Elizabeth McGovern (Lady Grantham) appear at ease with each other, as if they were really married. As Bonneville explains, "We have our own little ways of getting on with things but we can be very direct with each other if something is not clicking. [Elizabeth] is completely adorable, and just so easy to work with" (Rowley 251). Michelle Dockery (Lady Mary Crawley) adds that, "We're very much a family because we've spent so much time together over the years. The feeling on set is very happy – there is something about being a part of something that has become such a success. It's a wonderful atmosphere" (Rowley 255). The maintenance of the original cast enables viewers to recognize special characteristics and quirks. It is difficult, for example, to visualize a continuation of the series without Maggie Smith as Violet, the Dowager Countess of Grantham. Her dry wit and uncompromising comments on characters and events are an extremely important part of the pleasure of Downton Abbey.

Below stairs, the tiffs between Beryl Patmore, the cook, and Daisy Robinson, the kitchen maid, are a familiar feature of life in the kitchen. Both have strong personalities, and their values and ideas have changed very little as the series has progressed. As a result, the viewer is able to anticipate and understand problems. The rivalry between different characters below stairs also adds greatly to the enjoyment of the series; the competition between Mr Barrow, the first footman, and Mr Bates, Lord Grantham's valet, is a case in point. The irony of their dry comments to one another is not lost on the viewer, who knows what to expect and is thus well-prepared.

The coherence of the setting and characters in Downton Abbey is shown to particularly good advantage in the country estate, with its two almost separate and yet mutually reliant communities. English country estates have long fascinated audiences all over the world, as seen in such series as Upstairs, Downstairs (1970s) and films such as Gosford Park (2001, also starring Maggie Smith; Julian Fellowes also wrote the script for this highly successful film). The current popularity of the country estate is reflected in the publication of a number of new or re-printed books, including Clive Aslet's An Exuberant Catalogue of Dreams. The Americans Who Revived the Country House in Britain (2013), James Peill's The English Country House (2013) and Christopher Simon Sykes's Country House Camera (2013; first published in 1980). Most of these works have been published

after the beginning of Downton Abbey and are "recommended reading" when one orders books on Downton Abbey online. In reality, Downton Abbey is Highclere Castle in Berkshire. Highclere is the perfect setting for Downton Abbey as it brims with the aristocratic confidence that the house needs to embody. It is also the home of a real family (the Herbert family, Earls of Carnarvon), it is lived in, and it contains the artefacts needed to tell the Crawley family's story. The Herbert ancestors play the part of the Crawleys in their paintings hanging on the walls![16]

As Emma Rowley points out, the scenes featuring the servants, on the other hand, are not filmed at Highclere Castle but in a London studio because, like so many stately homes, the old kitchen at the Castle no longer exists. The below-stairs sets comprise an interlocking structure featuring the kitchen complex, the servants' hall, Mr Carson's pantry, Mrs Hughes's sitting room and a boot room![17] The designer of the set, Donald Woods, explains that it was built for "flow and movement" because life below stairs was busy and hectic (Rowley 62). It has been faithfully constructed in accordance with the furnishings and equipment of the time. Charmian Adams, the arts director of Downton Abbey, describes the below-stairs sets as "grey, slightly colorless – reflective of [the servants'] lives" (Rowley 50). The coherence of the set is enhanced by its almost claustrophobic character: the servants' quarters are cramped, allowing a maximum of fifteen servants to congregate at any one time. The resulting sense of intimacy and familiarity is retained throughout the series.

This familiarity can be enjoyed by young and old, male and female alike. Downton Abbey is for all the family: there are no scenes of explicit sex or violence. Even the war scenes are carefully chosen: they depict guns firing, bombs exploding and men shouting, but few casualties. The focus is on the home front and especially on the emotional stress of the women waiting for news of their loved ones, of which more shortly. The elegance and variety of costumes worn by the Crawley family and its visitors, the tiffs between the servants, and the mistakes made by junior members of staff both above and below stairs can be appreciated by all ages. The theme of love and marriage which permeates the series also appeals to all age groups. Downton Abbey demonstrates that love and marriage are for all classes, and that, while conventions may be different depending on one's social class, the strength of feeling and passion is the same. The marriage of Mr Bates and Anna (Lady Mary Crawley's maid) withstands the test of Bates's imprisonment (it is Anna's love and

persistence that finally prove him innocent); even the apparently passionless Mr Carson has been in love, and Lady Sybil's marriage to Branson, the chauffeur, demonstrates that love is stronger than wealth. Matthew and Lady Mary's union is eagerly awaited as the audience recognizes that they are kindred spirits who have loved each other from their very first meeting. When Matthew proposes to Mary in a romantic snowstorm, a dream comes true – not just for the couple themselves but for tens of thousands of viewers around the world. Life, however, is fickle. Matthew's death introduces a new era of uncertainty. Like so many in real life, Matthew survives the War, only to become a victim of an accident. As Julian Fellowes emphasises, nothing stands still at Downton Abbey even if actors such as Dan Stevens (Matthew Crawley) leave the show. The Abbey remains. In the present, fifth season, however, major changes seem likely, though what forms these will take is, at the time of writing, unclear. The fourth feature of the series, its modern tempo, is a very important reason for its success.

Gareth Neame argues that it is necessary for a series such as Downton Abbey to have the same accessibility and fast tempo as "the most contemporary show" (Rowley 11) if it is to appeal to a modern audience. That high tempo is achieved by quick changes of scene, which also make it possible to pay equal attention to the reactions and feelings of both the servants and their masters. [18] As rumors spread about the relationship between Sybil and Branson, for example, they are enriched by the very different views expressed by the Crawley family and their servants. The difference in social class between the couple, which is the primary problem, is perceived as problematic both by Sybil's family and by its servants, though for very different reasons. The Crawleys see it as a betrayal of the family's history and status; the servants, on the other hand, are confused: how does one, for example, address a former colleague who is now a member of the master's family? No-one, above or below stairs, is given much time to adjust.

On a technical level, the pace of the action does, however, present special problems for the actors – a problem that has been featured in, for example, the Swedish press. Penelope Wilton, for example, who plays Isobel Crawley, has commented that the scenes change too quickly: "As soon as you have started to play a scene, it's all over" (Stahl n. pag.). There is only a beginning and

middle, she claims; the end is missing. Judging by the popularity of the series, a modern audience, used to instant access to information, does not share Wilton's misgivings.

As critics have noted, the equal focus on the aristocrats and their servants, the fifth reason for the popularity of Downton Abbey, is an important source of friction and suspense.[19] How this works in the series is discussed here in terms of the domains of the two groups of characters, the strict hierarchical divisions both above and below stairs,[20] daily routines, and leisure interests. As in the real world, each member of the Downton household, both above and below stairs, has his or her proper place both physically and socially. In real life, the lord, for example, had his own study or library; his wife had a separate bedroom and dressing room, as well as a study or parlor for receiving visitors. The senior servants also had their own special domains: the butler kept his office and books in the butler's pantry; the housekeeper had her parlor; lower servants, on the other hand, rarely had rooms of their own. Just as servants did not venture into the upstairs rooms, except to clean and tidy, employers did not go below stairs, except on very special occasions.

As Sarah Warwick explains, in real aristocratic houses, the butler and the housekeeper were the most important servants (24-30). Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes are thus the most important servants in Downton Abbey. Like their real-life counterparts, they are in charge of the other servants. In real life, a butler was responsible for ensuring that everything ran smoothly below stairs: "Reporting to his master, he governed the other servants with a rod of iron, looked after the downstairs accounts and managed relations between upstairs and down" (Warwick 16). Mr Carson moves easily between the two groups, as does Mrs Hughes. In the real world, the housekeeper was in charge of all female servants, of ordering supplies, and "helping her mistress to make decisions about the running of the household" (Warwick 16). Mrs Hughes carries the keys to the storerooms and pantries with her at all times. She consults with the Countess of Grantham about menus and the arrangements for special occasions, as well as the accommodation of distinguished guests.

The focus on Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes below stairs is mirrored by the influence and authority of the Earl and Countess of Grantham above stairs. Lord Grantham is responsible for all decisions regarding the management of the estate and the employees; Lady Grantham is in charge of the management of the house, the reception and entertainment of visitors, and the conduct of her three daughters. All four characters – Mr Carson, Mrs Hughes, and Lord and Lady Grantham –

receive approximately the same degree of attention within the series and have absolute power within their respective domains.

The three daughters above stairs, Lady Mary, Lady Sybil, and Lady Edith, however, have minds of their own, as is shown at different times during the series. This leads to friction between themselves and their parents, adding to the suspense. Mary is adamant, for example, that she will influence the running of the estate once she is married, and supports Matthew in his plans to adopt new farming methods to improve the financial situation of Downton Abbey after World War One. Sybil persists in marrying Branson, attends suffragette meetings, and is interested in the woman's question (women's rights and especially the right to vote) – this at a time when it was not considered respectable for the aristocracy to be concerned with such matters.

Life after the War is no longer quite the same below stairs either. Mr Carson is constantly reminded by Mrs Hughes that times are changing: more consideration and freedom, she argues, must be given to servants. Like the Earl, Mr Carson is hard to persuade – but he is not intransigent. Friction between the different characters above and below stairs is given approximately equal attention in the series, and it is always resolved in the interests of harmony. It is usually the women (the Countess above stairs and Mrs Hughes below) who find a means of restoring concord. The skill with which both characters resolve conflicts in their different domains is impressive.

As the earlier mentioned Gareth Neame points out, equal focus is given in the series to the all-important hierarchical relations above and below stairs (Rowley 9-13). These are defined by the character's area(s) of responsibility, setting limits that cannot be overstepped without severe penalties: disobedience on the part of the Earl's three daughters can endanger their right of inheritance, for example; questioning orders below stairs is likely to result in the sack. If Sybil had been the oldest daughter, her chances of marrying Branson would have been greatly reduced. Impertinence to Mr Carson or Mrs Hughes, or conduct deemed unfit for a servant, would result in immediate dismissal (Jessica Fellowes, The World of Downton Abbey 40-65). Edna Braithwaite is a case in point. Sacked at Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes's instigation when they discover that she is trying to develop a relationship with the now widowed Branson, she is forced to leave Downton Abbey with immediate effect. There is no room for discussion.

Routines both above and below stairs are given considerable prominence in Downton Abbey. Thanks to the advice and supervision of the historical adviser, Alistair Bruce, these are historically accurate and an endless source of fascination for the viewer as they demonstrate the different activities of the two groups at different times of the day (these are also described in Sarah Warwick's Upstairs & Downstairs, 2011).[21] The relentless speed with which the servants must work is in sharp contrast with the leisurely way of life above stairs. It is the servants' primary function to ensure the comfort of the Crawley family. As in reality, extravagant dinner parties, dances, weekend visits to other stately homes, trips abroad, riding and hunting are highly esteemed pursuits of the leisured class, where neither time nor money sets limits.

Servants, on the other hand, have only half a day off per week, allowing them just enough time to visit relatives or to enjoy short outings in the immediate area. This does not mean, however, that they do not have any pleasure. The servants at the Abbey, like their counterparts in real life, attend dances, parties, and fairs when the occasion arises. Because the worlds above and below stairs must work together for the general good, both are important in their different ways. Moreover, to understand the routines above and below stairs, and how they are mutually dependent, it is necessary for the viewer to move naturally and smoothly between the two worlds.

Historical authenticity in all areas of the lives of the Crawley family and their servants is of prime importance not only to Alastair Bruce but also to Julian Fellowes. This is particularly obvious in relation to physical location, props, clothing, the characters' appearance, manners and social mores, technology, and transport. Careful attention is given, for example, to recreating the period on screen as faithfully as possible at each location. The village of Bampton in Oxfordshire was chosen as Downton village because the stone of its buildings is similar in color to that found in Yorkshire, where Downton Abbey is set. The village contains a church (where Mary and Matthew are married), Isobel Crawley's home, and the Grantham Arms, where Branson memorably refused a bribe from Lord Grantham to give up his daughter. The village post office is decorated with Lord Kitchener's iconic wartime recruitment poster exclaiming that the country "Needs You!" The authenticity of the poster is enhanced by the addition of three letters, "RIP" (Rest in Peace), scribbled by hand by a disenchanted citizen.

The props are carefully modelled on authentic items dating from the 1920s, as well as from the two previous decades, to give a sense of history. Modernist trends, for example, are clearly reflected in the London flat belonging to Gregson (Lady Edith Crawley's sweetheart). Many of the set decorations have been bought or hired and are used repeatedly to provide continuity. Others are created in-house by the art department: these include period product labels, menus, newspapers, and everything that the Crawley family and its servants eat. Newspapers are recreated from scans of antique publications kept at the British Library's archive in London. News items are inserted to suit the needs of the plot, including news stories or announcements. Period menus are used from such restaurants as the Criterion in London or from the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. The tins of boot polish in the boot room have in-house labels based on original ones that have been scanned and duplicated. The letters which the actors read are written on authentic-style paper and in a distinctive script to suit each character. Special envelopes were produced for the series because those used in the 1920s were much smaller than envelopes today. Alastair Bruce ensures that the addresses are correctly laid out. No postcode, for example, was required for prominent people: the Dowager Countess's address is thus "The Dowager Countess of Grantham, The Dower House, Downton, Yorkshire". Each envelope has a one-penny stamp and is franked.

Authentic clothing is particularly important for a series such as Downton Abbey. Under the supervision of the Emmy-Award-winning costume designer Caroline McCall, authentic costumes are either bought up or made from scratch. Where dresses are tailor-made, they usually include authentic items in the form of pieces of fabric and decorations from the period. As in real life, clothes are chosen to match the personality and preferences of the characters. As Michelle Dockery (Lady Mary Crawley) points out, the detail of her wedding dress is "extraordinary": "It was incredibly fragile, and because of all the work that had gone into it we were really careful. It was very much how you would treat your own wedding dress" (Rowley 167). At the end of World War One, color came into fashion. This is reflected in the dresses that Lady Edith Crawley wears in London (her clothing is more somber at the Abbey, where the taste is more subdued and conventional). Mourning clothes must also be produced for the Crawley family and its guests. The series shows that the relentless mourning of the Victorians, who always dressed in black, was

going out of fashion as people began to move into half-mourning (where grey and deep red were worn) and then into normal clothes.

Similarly, women's complexions must be authentic. In the early 20th century it was not considered respectable for women to wear make-up. As a result, the show's hair and make-up designer, Magi Vaughan, uses air brushes to create a natural effect, "a glow in the skin so the light just picks it up, which gives you that porcelain look" (Rowley 211). The color created is a pale pink that gives the appearance of a natural blush. Because the eyes and the lips were rounded in the 1920s, Vaughan uses a light lip pencil to give faces "that popular Twenties look" (Rowley 238). Servants at the time would have been completely bare-faced. For this reason, Vaughan uses very light air brushing without any coloring for the Downton servants.

Different hairstyles complement the actors' complexions and are suited to the particular occasion. In season four, for example, Downton Abbey is still in the era of long hair for women. The hairstyles of the various actors are described by Emma Rowley (238-241). The Marcel wave, which gives natural-looking curly hair, was introduced at the end of the War (Edith wears the Marcel wave. See Rowley 241 for a picture). While in reality women would have used curling tongs that they put in the oven (with the obvious risk of burning), the Downton Abbey crew use electric tongs, which produce the same effect if applied correctly. Wigs are also used to save time. Formal hairstyles are created for important occasions such as dances and dinners. The bandeau is used as well as tiaras, which are set not just in the hair but, more fashionably, lower on the forehead. Tiaras are often worn by visitors to Downton Abbey dinners and dances. Even the posture of the actors must correspond to the period; for this reason, Alastair Bruce makes characters practice carrying things on their head to force their shoulders back.

Table manners at Downton Abbey are also authentic: no hands are permitted on the table; a woman only removes her gloves when seated at the table; no item is selected from a plate and replaced in favor of another; cutlery is handled gently and placed on the plate when not in use (Warwick 101). The rules were equally strict for the serving staff. Downton Abbey shows that it was the butler and footmen who served at table. Like their counterparts in real life, they wear thin-soled shoes to avoid sound, wear gloves at all times, pick up bowls with two hands to prevent spilling,

and fill and remove plates from the left but serve wine and water from the right (Warwick 101). “It is the way it’s done and we observe it meticulously,” observes Alistair Bruce (Rowley 126).

Formalities are similarly strictly observed below stairs. When the butler, Mr Carson, enters the servants’ refectory, everybody rises. The servants sit at table in order of rank, the most senior sitting closest to Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes. Relations between the servants themselves and between the servants and the Crawley family at Downton Abbey have changed little since Victorian times. Other more practical changes are nonetheless beginning to make themselves felt in the house, thereby increasing the family’s contact with the outside world. Typically, the Dowager Countess, as a representative of the older generation, is suspicious of all innovations, and particularly of the telephone and electricity. By 1912, the start of the Downton Abbey series, the British National Telephone Company catered for 561,738 subscribers across the country (Jessica Fellowes, The World of Downton Abbey 91). Not all welcomed telephones with open arms, however. In the series, Mrs Patmore, for example, dislikes the sound of the telephone ringing, declaring, “Oh, my Lord. Listen to that. It’s like the cry of the banshee” (Jessica Fellowes, The World of Downton Abbey 91).[22] Mr Carson is also initially reluctant to use the telephone, while others, like Lord Grantham, take to it with pleasure and ease. Predictably, his enthusiasm does not impress his mother, who remains intransigent.

In contrast to the Dowager Countess’s opposition to the installation of electricity at Downton Abbey (her comment, “I couldn’t have electricity in the house. I wouldn’t sleep a wink. All those vapours seeping about,” makes her position perfectly clear), most of the servants welcome it because it allows for the introduction of a number of labor-saving devices such as the food mixer (this is eagerly used by Daisy, for example, to make soufflés). As in real life, electricity is initially installed on the ground floor of the house, but by 1916 the Crawley family’s bedrooms as well as the servants’ quarters are electrified. Downton Abbey thus represents a typical modern country home of its time.

The other great modern invention to reach Downton Abbey is the motor car. Lady Edith Crawley is quick to recognize its uses and advantages, and even the Dowager Countess learns to appreciate the comfort and convenience of the car. Unlike many large houses in the real world, which could employ up to five chauffeurs, Downton has only one, Tom Branson. The Downton Abbey cars are

vintage originals. Cars mark progress, so much so that for the episodes after World War One it was necessary for the producers of the series to choose a new model, a maroon and black Sunbeam. Emma Rowley's Behind the Scenes at Downton Abbey contains several photographs of this magnificent vehicle. Interestingly, in order to give the impression that the vehicles at Downton Abbey are at the cutting edge of technology, it was necessary to add healthier engine sounds which "give the impression of purring motors. It wouldn't do for Lord Grantham to be ferried about by a sputtering engine, after all" (Rowley 144).

The changes brought about by technical innovations are compounded by the events and consequences of World War One. In reality, as in season two, when servants and masters enlisted in the army, served as nurses at home and/or at the front, or worked in munitions factories or on the land, divisions between rich and poor became less pronounced: World War One was a force for democratization. As Isobel Crawley states in season two, which is set in the War: "This is a war! And we must be in it together! High and low, rich and poor! There can be no 'special cases' because every man at the front is a special case to someone!" As an officer (in the North Riding Volunteers), Matthew Crawley finds himself fighting alongside men of different social ranks. He is in the thick of the fighting with those who have previously served him at Downton Abbey. Bullets wound rich and poor alike, with equal ferocity and with the same disastrous consequences. World War One brings about important changes in attitude at Downton Abbey, especially among the members of the Crawley family: all three of the Crawley daughters are involved in war work. The Abbey itself is turned into a hospital which, while it is for officers and not soldiers, is forced to open its doors to doctors and nurses of all social classes.[23]

Both at Downton Abbey and in the village, the women worry about their loved ones at the front. They are deliberately kept ignorant of the conditions under which their men live and fight. In real life, letters and postcards arrived only intermittently, and they were deliberately uninformative (soldiers could only cross out certain options on official postcards and could not include any extra information) (Booth 14).[24] There was also always the possibility that the postman would arrive with a telegram announcing the loss of a loved one. This tension and ignorance are recreated in Downton Abbey by an ingenious method: Alistair Bruce took the male actors aside when recording the second season and gave them details of life at the front that they were instructed not to share

with the female actors. As a result, when the wounded Matthew Crawley and William Mason (second footman) arrive at Downton Abbey, the impact is enormous both above and below stairs. The truth that death and destruction do not distinguish between rich and poor is devastating; the entire household is united in its shock and sorrow.

In Downton Abbey, as in the real world, the War also, however, presents new opportunities. For the poor of early 20th century Britain, it provided new alternatives to a life of servitude. As one historian writes, “It was the outbreak of the First World War which really sounded the death knell for domestic service, at least to the extent that it had flourished before. . . . 400,000 people left service and the government and press urged employers to let their staff go” (Maloney 179). Many of those who survived the War did not return to service as the hours were too long, there was too little freedom, and the pay was poor.[25] Meanwhile, Downton Abbey’s Lady Edith Crawley represents the group of aristocratic women who welcomed the opportunity to try something new. Her driving of a tractor and physical work on the Abbey farm is initially greeted with surprise by her family but, as in real life, it soon becomes commonplace. Lady Sybil Crawley, like so many women of her station in real life, is not content to do “simple war work” such as raising funds for the soldiers and their families but enlists as a Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) nurse. Both Lady Edith and Lady Sybil represent the “new women” of the early 20th century, who welcomed the opportunity to adopt roles hitherto reserved for men and to prove their worth. Violet, the Dowager Countess, on the other hand, represents the older generation, who staunchly resists change. When the Abbey is converted into a hospital for officers, for example, the Dowager’s comment, “Oh really, it’s like living in a second-rate hotel, where the guests keep arriving and no-one seems to leave” (Jessica Fellowes, The World of Downton Abbey 259) encapsulates the disgust of the older generation at the change in customs and behavior on the country estate brought about by World War One.

Lord Grantham’s summary of the changes after the War expresses loss but also the need to move on: “We’ve dreamed a dream . . . but now it’s over. The world was in a dream before the war but now it’s woken up and said goodbye to it. And so must we” (Jessica Fellowes, The World of Downton Abbey 263). The economics that underpin Downton Abbey have changed forever, as indeed they had for its real-life counterpart, Highclere Castle: “The house [Highclere] was no longer

purely a symbol of the leisured class. It needed to earn its own way" (Herbert, Lady Catherine 49). This ushered in a new era of progress for those who recognized and accepted the world that had emerged after 1918. As the Downton Abbey series progresses, we see that change is not only possible but even has positive consequences, even if it is resisted both above and below stairs. It remains to be seen whether season five will demonstrate that the occupants of the Abbey are both willing and able to embrace further changes as Britain approaches a second world war.

The seven features of Downton Abbey detailed in this article have ensured the popularity of what has become the most highly acclaimed television series of all time – a series that, according to Julian Fellowes, has carved out a niche in the collective memory:

> *What I would like to feel is that we are one of those milestone bits of television that people remember years later – that's enough for me . . . I have chosen to make my life painting pictures in the air. You finish them, and people either enjoy them or they don't. But either way, by the next day they're gone – and . , . I'm okay with that. (Rowley 278)*

As established at the beginning of this article, Downton Abbey is both a literary and media success. It is an important part of English heritage and English collective memory. Downton Abbey is personalized history, characterized by intimacy and immediacy. The books cited here greatly add to the enjoyment, understanding and appreciation of the television series. Julian Fellowes continues to edit the official scripts, and it seems likely that new books on the series will be published as Downton Abbey has begun its fifth season. Downton Abbey has become not just a British but an international phenomenon of considerable dimensions – and, fortunately for us, it shows no signs of coming to an end.

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[1] Italics are used to differentiate the television series from the stately home itself (Highclere Castle in reality).

[2] In his foreword to Fellowes and Sturgis 2013, Julian Fellowes states that in finding a reason for the popularity of Downton Abbey, "[if] I were to put my finger on one element, it might be that we have made the decision to treat every character, the members of the family and the members of their staff, equally, in terms of their narrative strength. They all have emotional lives, dreams, ambitions and disappointments, and with all of them we suggest a back story" (Fellowes and Sturgis 6). Fellowes adds that he sympathizes with both groups of characters: "It is precisely because I identify with both teams that my writing, if I am allowed to say so, aspires to a kind of social justice which, I believe anyway, is one of the reasons [Downton Abbey] has reached so wide an audience" (8). Jacky Hyams, on the other hand, argues that an important reason for the popularity of Downton Abbey "is its very proximity in time to today; we're not looking at the very distant past here. These lives, so different from our own in every way and lived in an atmosphere of amazing wealth, extreme formality and snobbery, stuffy convention, etiquette – and unbelievable servitude – were lived just over a hundred years ago" (x).

[3] In addition to these factors, Downton Abbey translates easily into other countries and cultures. Gareth Neame, one of the executive producers, claims that, "It sounds absurd in a way when I say it, but I think audiences around the world look at the group of people as an extension of their family" (Rowley 275). In this regard, Downton Abbey is a soap opera, employing the dramatic and narrative tricks of the genre. Jacky Hyams makes the additional point that Downton Abbey has a special attraction because the lives depicted are "so different from our own in every way . . . and . , . were lived just over a hundred years ago" (x). For details of the international awards won by Downton Abbey, see Hyams 272-76.

[4] See Steve Anderson (2014) for an appraisal of Williams's views.

[5] It is not the purpose of this article to discuss audience reception of heritage films and television series. Readers interested in this field are referred to Claire Monk's Heritage Film Audiences. Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011. Monk points to "the diversity and complexity of identities, responses and viewing positions

among the (plural) audiences who watch and enjoy period films – including their activity and, at times, creativity" (180). It is beyond the scope of the present article to enter this complex debate.

[6] See Amazon.com for the full range of books and Downton Abbey memorabilia available.

[7] Jessica Fellowes is the niece of Julian Fellowes, the creator of Downton Abbey.

[8] In his introduction, J. P. Sperati describes how approximately sixty-five people and one-hundred "extras" are required for around "two minutes of usable footage" (Sperati and Schreiner 7). "No wonder, then," he argues, "that the series has received critical acclaim and won numerous accolades . . . and is the most successful drama series since Brideshead Revisited in 1981" (7). This is perhaps a little simplistic in that it is not just the enormous financial resources invested in Downton Abbey that have made it so popular but, as I demonstrate, the close attention paid to historical detail.

[9] There are numerous parodies on the internet. Following are a few examples: Downton Abbey Parodies on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLRG5EJF-fStFdif35v27f1mzXxpK6zyF4); "DirecTV Picks Up 'Downton Abbey' Parody Series 'The Britishes'from Electus Digital" (http://deadline.com/2014/10/downton-abby-parody-series-the-britishes-directv-electus-big-breakfast-858058/); and SNL Parodies Downton Abbey (http://perezhilton.com/tv/SNL_Parodies_Downton_Abbey/?id=239d3a7b744a3). All websites were accessed on 2 Nov. 2014.

[10] The three friends who share a passion for Downton Abbey that will change their lives. The series is described as follows by one of the friends, Samantha: "It's set in this fabulous castle in the English countryside. It's a very elaborately done soap opera with enough history thrown in to make you feel virtuous" (Wax 109).

[11] The annotated script for the third season will be available in November 2014.

[12] Jay Winter and Emmanuel Sivan draw a similar conclusion (2-3). Focusing on the collective memory of war and "the issues raised by the shadow of war" (3), they conclude that acts of remembrance are essential in order to come to terms with the vivid and traumatic phenomenon of war. Downton Abbey is one such act of remembrance.

[13] This point is made by, among others, Richard Evans (8-9).

[14] The same argument is put forward in Arthur Marwick (218).

[15] This is made clear in the two published transcripts: Julian Fellowes, Downton Abbey. The Complete Scripts. Season One. The Shooting Scripts with Unseen Material and Commentary. London: HarperCollins, 2012; and Julian Fellowes, Downton Abbey. The Complete Scripts. Season Two. The Shooting Scripts with Unseen Material and Commentary. London: HarperCollins, 2013. The third transcript is to be published on 4 December 2014.

[16] The popularity of Downton Abbey has stimulated tourism at Highclere Castle, which offers a range of guided tours, caters for educational visits, and hosts receptions, engagement parties, weddings, and other special events. The Castle also has a well-stocked gift shop. For further information, see Highclere Castle Website. According to the Press and Media Assistant, Julia Robins, Highclere Castle receives between 1,200 and 1,500 visitors per day when it is open to the general public (e-mail, 19 May 2014). James Delingpole writes, “Last summer, Highclere took 100 coach party bookings; this year, thanks to the Downton effect, that figure has risen to 600. With group tickets priced at L12 per person, and individual tickets at L15, this expected six-fold rise in visitor numbers will give Highclere its biggest financial fillip since 1895 (when the fifth Earl landed a cool L25 million in today’s terms by marrying into the de Rothschild clan)” (n. pag.)

[17] For detailed information about the appearance and functions of each room, see Rowley 62-77.

[18] The high tempo is also addressed in Wendy Wax’s novel While We Were Watching Downton Abbey, where the narrator comments: “The plot had been thickening and the story lines racing forward at a pace that Claire couldn’t help admiring even as she compared its graceful dance to the fumbling, halfhearted [sic] steps of her own manuscript” (Claire is one of the three protagonists, and an author; Wax 163). Wax compares the events of Downton Abbey with everyday life. The final paragraph of the novel, which describes the reflections of Edward (a concierge), emphasizes that Downton Abbey and modern life have important things in common, and that this is one of the reasons why the series is so successful: “As they watched the show unfold, Edward watched them [the three friends and other inhabitants of the apartment block he serves] and knew as he hadn’t before, that even an ordinary life could rival the comedy and tragedy of a really great period drama. That fairy tales could come true if only they were allowed to. And that friendship was the most

potent magic of all; able to form without warning or explanation and in the most unexpected of ways and places. Just as it had while they were watching Downton Abbey" (354).

[19] This has been noted by among others Jessica Long in her short study Downton Abbey. Your Backstage Pass to the Era and the Making of the TV Series, whose subtitle includes "unofficial and unauthorized". Long claims that the success of the series "is almost definitely down to the intrigue the two very different lifestyles [upstairs and downstairs] create" (5). She also argues that it provides a form of escapism "from our own lives", hearkening back to a time "where everyone knew their role and place in life" (37).

[20] Gareth Neame claims that "any closed world dominated by hierarchies works well on TV. There is that endless fascination of a world where some people have everything and others have very little, yet they are all thrown together in a pressure cooker" (Fellowes and Sturgis 304).

[21] Warwick's study is divided into the following sections: "Before Dawn," "Breakfast Time," "Morning Activities," "Lunchtime," "Afternoon Activities," "Fine Dining,", and "The End of the Day."

[22] A banshee is a female spirit in Irish and Scottish mythology; usually regarded as an omen of death, its defining characteristic is its piercing wail.

[23] Highclere Castle was itself converted into a hospital during World War One. The present Lady Carnarvon writes: "Everything had been designed to make Highclere's luxurious country-house lifestyle available to the injured soldiers; Almina [the Countess of Carnarvon] had re-imagined the Castle as a therapeutic space, one where the atmosphere in the Library or the excellent cooking from the Castle's kitchen was as important as the services of the radiologist she planned to bring down from London" (Herbert, Lady Almina 140). Countess Almina discovered that nursing was her vocation and her efforts to nurse the wounded back to health were much appreciated, as shown in the large number of letters she received from ex-patients, "who wrote that without the superb care they had received . . . they would have lost legs, or their minds, or hope" (Herbert, Lady Catherine 21).

[24] At the top of the postcard it read: "NOTHING is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the postcard will be destroyed."

[25] See Paterson: “Once the war was over, the number of girls considering service was so reduced that training colleges were set up to try and develop a sense of pride and efficiency in household work. These attracted applicants, but they did not succeed in stemming the tide of sheer disinclination to practise these skills as a servant” (241).



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