

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE? EXCEPT AN ENGLISH WINTER. DOWNTON ABBEY, A BRITISH CULT TV SERIES AND ITS FANDOM

Lucia Tralli, Università di Bologna

Abstract

The British TV show *Downton Abbey* is a significant case – with its unprecedented and unexpected worldwide success – in a more general evaluation of the contemporary media environment, and of European TV productions in particular. This article explores the *Downton Abbey* “phenomenon” through a survey of its fans’ online activities. The first introductory part of this essay focuses on the concept of Cult TV Show and its possible application to this peculiar product. The second part extensively discusses *Downton Abbey* fans’ online activities, monitored from August to September 2012. This part is focused on five different factors of the series identified as those that mainly raised the interest and approval of the fans. Finally, the last part of this article draws some conclusions about the global nature of *Downton Abbey* fandom and about the series status as “mainstream cult.”

The award-winning, critically acclaimed period drama *Downton Abbey*, created and written by Academy-Award winner Julian Fellowes, tells the story of the aristocratic Crawley family and their many servants, all living in the beautiful countryside estate, Downton Abbey. Set over a time period that extends from the sinking of the Titanic – which opens the first episode – through the First World War – encompassing the second season – to the Roaring Twenties in the third season, the show revolves around upstairs-downstairs dynamics, telling the compelling stories of characters that face a world that is rapidly and permanently changing. With the third season’s premiere in the UK collecting an average of 9 million viewers,¹ the astonishingly high ratings in the US giving the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) its highest ratings in years,² the series’ enormous success in over 100 countries and its listing in the Guinness World Records as the most critically acclaimed show on television of 2010, *Downton Abbey* can easily claim its inclusion in the realm of cult TV. But what is so compelling about the lives and tragedies of the Crawley family and their estate? Producers, writers and even media commentators were apparently surprised by *Downton*’s enormous success which exceeded all expectations.³ We have decided to explore this series from the fans’ point of view, trying to map their online activities and focusing on features of the series they seem to appraise as valuable of their time and attention. As a result of this survey, we have identified some factors of interest among *Downton* fandom and we will describe in detail the main

ones: the Romance factor, the Dowager factor, the Writing factor, the Historical/Retro Fashion factor and the Silliness mode.

A British cult TV show

Before starting to dig into *Downton*'s fandom, we want to give some words on the definition of the cult TV show and how it could be relevant to the aims of our investigation.

Cult media, its very definition and its fandom have been the core of a longstanding branch of studies⁴ devoted to understanding what defines cult media and what differentiates them from "normal" media. We are exploring a scenario in which *Downton Abbey* has been claimed to be "part of our culture" and "one of the TV shows that our generation will remember,"⁵ thus some parameters specified by cult media studies could be very useful for guiding our survey.

Much research on cult television series tries to determine the "cultness" of a show or film by starting from its inner characteristics as a text, following the path traced by Umberto Eco's famous definition:

*[A cult work] must provide a completely furnished world so that its fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the fan's private sectarian world, a world about which one can make up quizzes and play trivia games so that the adepts of the sect recognize through each other a shared expertise. Naturally all these elements [...] must have some archetypical appeal.*⁶

As we will see, the factors that captivate fandom's interest in *Downton Abbey* can be connected to inner aspects of the show as a text, such as characters and plot, or setting and costumes: *Downton* proves to be a very furnished world indeed, one in which fans can stroll around and pick up what they like.

Roberta Pearson and Sarah Gwenllian-Jones, in their recent co-edited volume, *Cult Television*,⁷ point out that: "an understanding and definition of cult television must be predicated on the full circuit of communication, that is, texts, production/distribution, and audiences."⁸ In their opinion the visibility of cult programs: "arises from the distinctive practices of cult television fans, which include the formation of loose interpretative communities and the production of tertiary texts."⁹

As for audience visibility, *Downton Abbey* has surely engendered quite a vast active fandom. Although the show gained some attention in the media for "eccentric" fan activities, like the costume dinners organized by *Downtonians* for communal viewings of the show,¹⁰ the majority of fan communities are mostly "invisible" and "common" – those will be the core of our focus.

As for the general context, in the last two years the media hype around *Downton* has been massive – in spite of a meager promotional campaign from networks¹¹ – and has attracted more and more viewers to the show, encouraging a collective experience that brought back "the sense of anticipation we felt about watching television again."¹² The term "cult" has been widely applied to this show in newspapers, magazines and public discourse: many articles define it as a "phenomenon,"¹³ a "must-see TV show"¹⁴ and it has been listed on the British *CultBox* website alongside other longstanding fan favorites like *Doctor Who*.¹⁵

Moreover, we cannot neglect that part of the series' success outside the United Kingdom is due

to its “Britishness.” The “British media frenzy,” as Francesca Coppa defines this concept in describing the origins of American fans (of British television?),¹⁶ started long before *Downton* and has roots in more than just television, as the enormous success of every Jane Austen film adaptation has confirmed. Undoubtedly, *Downton* benefits from a sort of “British thrill” that has caught television audiences, although it is certainly not the only successful English TV show now being praised all over the world. Both longstanding cult show *Doctor Who*, in its latest “re-incarnation” (2005-), and the latest reboot of a mythic figure of English literature, Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock*, 2011-), are at the moment included among the “must-see” TV shows. However, while the majority of these shows pertain to the sci-fi or mystery genre, *Downton Abbey*, as a “classic” period drama, is indeed a very unusual series to become cult TV.

PBS has been the American provider of British media from the mid-1970s. Its long running series *Masterpiece*, which hosts *Downton*, has been transmitted on the network for 40 years and features mostly “heritage” films and TV shows. With its highbrow quality of script, acting, and costumes, *Downton* appears to be not so distant from the miniseries and TV films that *Masterpiece* has been airing in the US to mixed results. However, not only was *Downton*’s success unprecedented in the history of the network, but its global appeal seems confirmed by outstanding ratings in almost every country in which it airs.¹⁷ Moreover, the series managed to engage a young audience, a first for this kind of genre.¹⁸

The enormous success of this series brings us to a crucial element regarding the definition of cult media: the “niche vs. mainstream issue,”¹⁹ with cult TV usually diverging from the latter. As Matt Hills argues in *Mainstream Cult*, an essay dedicated to *Doctor Who*,²⁰ the “mainstream vs. niche” audience is indeed a factor considered by many to be of vital importance in defining what a cult (TV show) is given the term’s origin in the milieu of the fantasy and sci-fi genre, always deemed to be the realm of a geek and subcultural audience.

Therefore, it is difficult to understand how a product can be “cult” and at the same time attract millions of viewers, which is the case for both *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey*.

It is in regards to such a contradiction that it has become challenging to simply address series such as *Doctor Who* and *Downton Abbey* – which attract millions of viewers – as cult TV, for their “cultness” does not always fit into what we have seen as cult media parameters.

Fandom under the lens

Our survey took place from the last week of August till early September 2012, a very busy period for *Downton* fandom awaiting – and then commenting about – the third season, which premiered in the UK on 16 September 2012.

In the matter of fandom research, we believe, paraphrasing Tisha Turk words,²¹ that while the special cases of fan activity are often poignant and understandable outside fandom, it is the more typical and ordinary fan activities, and their numbers, that can really give us meaningful insights to and help us trace significant patterns and trends within fandom.

Methodologically speaking, we chose to adopt a mixed strategy of quantitative and qualitative analysis in order to effectively map the field of the English-speaking fandom. In some cases, we could use tools for data scraping and collecting that provided us with samples and measurable

data.²² In other cases, this kind of analysis was impossible – especially for Tumblr blogs and posts.²³

In our survey we have not made, and in many cases could not make, any geographical distinction regarding *Downton* fans: with the notable exception of the live-tweet feed that was mostly composed of UK Twitter fans following the third season's premiere on TV, most activities could have been pursued from any place in the world, hence confirming the transnational nature of *Downton* fandom.

We tried to map a large range of activities: from the well-established, such as fansites, to the most recent, such as Tumblr; from the most immediate, such as live-tweet comments during the airing of an episode, to the most time consuming, such as fanfictions and fanvideos. While some results are strictly connected to the moment under observation, such as Twitter feed and blog posts, results from fanfictions and fanvideos are ascribable to a longer lapse of time. Through this intricate scenario of fan reactions and responses to the show we hoped to provide a veritable image of the multilayered framework implemented by our convergent mediascape, one that seizes on “the new eases of opportunity brought about by digital technologies, broadband internet and the wider set of technologies and internet uses clustered under the ‘Web 2.0’ umbrella.”²⁴

Given the daily traffic on Tumblr (around 300 posts per day tagged #DowntonAbbey plus dozens for other tags referencing the show) and backlinks by other websites and blogs, we estimated Tumblr to be pivotal for *Downton* fandom's activities and decided, during the period mentioned above, to daily observe the website for collecting data for our survey.

As for fansites, once one of the most common fan activities on the web, we have retrieved very few (only 20) and those lacking a very high visit rating. In the matter of fanfiction, we considered two different portals, fanfiction.net and archiveofourown.org, selected for their longevity and importance among the fans. Using tags and descriptions to identify and classify the texts, we sampled 2108 stories (about *Downton Abbey*). We collected a sample of 837 fanvideos on the videosharing portal *YouTube*, sorted by using tags and keywords. As for Twitter, we considered two different kinds of activities: on one hand we observed the fanmade profiles of characters of the show and, on the other hand, we monitored the live twitter feed during the UK third season's premiere, collecting and analyzing a sample of about 22,000 tweets.²⁵

Everyone goes down the aisle with half the story hidden. The Romance factor

One of the main factors of fan interest in any film or show is frequently the romance, the love stories between two or more characters. If these love stories are written in the actual text, they are defined “canon;” if the joining of characters into a couple is only a fantasy of the fans, it represents a “non-canon” pairing. In the world of *Downton* there are three main canon couples for whom the audience roots: Lady Mary Crawley, the eldest daughter of Earl Grantham, and Matthew Crawley, the designated heir of the estate; Lady Sybil Crawley, the youngest and rebellious sister, and Tom Branson, the chauffeur for the family, the interclass and scandalous couple; and Anna Smith, head housemaid, and John Bates, Lord Grantham's valet, the downstairs couple.

The main concern of fanvideos is without a doubt Mary and Matthew, the most beloved – and *vidded*²⁶ – couple, with their classic “will they, won't they” plot, complicated by patrimonial is-

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

sues, severe war injuries and other unfortunate love interests getting in the way. 365 out of 837 videos created by *Downton Abbey* fans focus on this couple, with an overall counting view of about 3,000,000 visualizations, followed by Sybil and Branson with 136 videos and Anna and Bates with 44. Moreover, 40 videos are dedicated to all the three couples together, in montages that also show scenes of other “minor” pairings. With an overall of 585 videos about couples, romance is the most addressed topic in *Downton*’s fanvids.

In both fanfiction portals the majority of stories are classified as “romance:” 163 out of 374 on archiveofourown.org (95 about Mary and Matthew), and 1437 out of 1734 on fanfiction.net (414 about Mary and Matthew, 252 about Sybil and Branson and 164 about Anna and Bates). In the context of fanfiction, which more easily permits fans to speculate and indulge in non-canon stories, we have also a considerable group of stories about non-canon couples such as Mr. Carson, the butler, and Mrs. Hughes, the head housekeeper. On fanfiction.net there are 220 stories dedicated to this non-canonical pair, almost as many as those dedicated to Sybil and Branson.

On Twitter, via fanmade accounts, we can witness some (fan-made) romantic interactions. Usually the majority of posting activity occurs between episodes: fans love to recount the parts of the story that happen off screen through these Twitter profiles. For example, the fanmade @Lady_M_Crawley and @CaptainCrawley exchanged tweets regarding Mary and Matthew’s honeymoon in France, which happened entirely offscreen between the first and second episode of the third season.²⁷ Their long awaited wedding was one of the main storylines of the premiere and one of the main topics during the live-tweet (3000 tweets). The high excitement of fandom for this event can be summarized by user @sophie_gadd: “This is like the royal wedding all over again.”²⁸

I'm a woman, I can be as contrary as I choose. The Dowager factor

One of the most important, and most beloved, assets of *Downton Abbey*, in the eyes of its fandom, is Lady Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, portrayed by the legendary Dame Maggie Smith. Mother of the Earl of Grantham and *grandmama* of the three Crawley sisters, her character is a true fan favorite. Her caustic and abrasive spirit, her unsinkable respect for English traditions and old-fashion aristocratic life style, but, most of all, her fulminating one-liners that spare nobody (nor our titles for this essay and its paragraphs) outline a complex character that apparently everyone in the fandom loves to the core. It’s not by chance that the most seen fanvideo posted on *YouTube*, with more than 500,000 views, is a montage of her most memorable quotes from season 1, *Downton Abbey: Top 10 Maggie Moments*.²⁹ Only five videos, among the 837 we have gathered, are dedicated to this character, but they alone collect over 1 million of views.

In the fanfiction area, there aren’t many stories written exclusively about her. Still her character is listed in almost every fanfiction as a side character. This can confirm her status as one of *Downton*’s most beloved inhabitants, one that *must* be present in the stories told about this world.

There are multiple fanmade Twitter accounts about the Countess³⁰ and during live-tweets many users simply re-tweet her lines. During the premiere about 1000 tweets referred directly to her character, mostly cherishing her return on the screen.

You'll find there's never a dull moment in this house. The Writing factor

*I love it because it's a posh soap-opera written by a poet.
It brings together my love for plausible-but-unlikely sentimental scenarios,
huge ensembles and great writing.*³¹

The series' writing, the storylines, and their portrayal by the actors appear to be an important element of interest for fans. As Mark Jankovich and Nathan Hunt argue, fans' "persistent interest in scripts and the ways in which they develop characters and story lines shows the insistence on literary values, as does the concern with the devices and techniques of storytelling."³² These values are an instrument in the eternal struggle of "real" fans to position themselves against "despicable" inauthentic commercial media and anti-fans.

This interest can be located, on one hand, in the story arch of every character, and, on the other, in the ensemble of events. Much attention is given, for example, to the events of the First World War that absorb every episode of the second season and affect almost every character. In the general commentary about the series, both on Tumblr posts and on Twitter, the series' "great writing" is usually stressed and endlessly cited by fans. During live-tweets many users praised the quality of the show and its writing: "*Downton Abbey* is quality TV!,"³³ "Julian Fellows, you are a genius. Episode one of *Downton Abbey* was divine from the first scene to the last #ScreenwritingGenius."³⁴ In the days after an episode aired, half of the Tumblr posts discussed the faults and credits of the plots and the authors' development of the story, criticizing quite harshly any unwanted element.

In our sample, 144 fanvideos, having almost a million views overall, can be linked to this kind of interest. Some are recaps of entire episodes or seasons.³⁵ Others focus on general themes of the series, usually on an emotional level, like "regret" or "forgiveness."³⁶ Many are tributes to the ensemble of the cast, but there are also 36 character vids, videos that focus on a single character story.

Besides the couples and Lady Violet, *Downtonians* usually show a very broad interest for each character: although the series has a large cast, all the minor characters have enough screen time to make the audience feel attached to them. The one most discussed is probably Thomas Barrow, the scheming footman. Aided by his accomplice, O'Brien, Thomas is the only evil character in the show. The fact that he is portrayed as a closeted homosexual and a "troubled soul" enhance his appeal. The interest in his figure is clearly demonstrated by the fact that one³⁷ of the only two videos dedicated to his character has collected about 350,000 views, "classifying" it as the second most viewed video of all *Downton Abbey*'s videos. Thomas is quite popular also in fanfictions, especially in the *slash* categories.

What is a week-end? The Historical/Retro Fashion factor

*It feels like such a different period drama to any others that have been before,
kind of more updated. The characters are brilliant,
such amazing storylines. The setting of the house is gorgeous!!!
The costumes, the hair!*³⁸
*I wish I was born around the time of Downton Abbey I love all the dresses, houses and cars.*³⁹

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

We can easily apply to *Downton* what Andrew Higson asserts are the pleasures of so-called British heritage films:

*These films are set in the past, telling stories of the manner and proprieties, [...] in carefully detailed and visually splendid period reconstructions. The luxurious country-house settings, the picturesque rolling green landscapes of southern England, the pleasures of period costume [...] are among the more frequently noted attractions of such films.*⁴⁰

A pivotal part in fan fascination in *Downton Abbey* is without a doubt its historical setting, the first two decades of 20th century. Through the series, the contemporary audience can witness a period of disruptive changes and innovations in history, a far away world transforming into something more similar to the contemporary world, an occurrence audiences can easily empathize with. As Claire Monk states in her longstanding research on both off and online⁴¹ heritage film audiences, there are recurring pleasures and interests that people display regarding these products. One is the “value of authenticity,” the accuracy of the historical aspects of the story. In *Downton*, fans are clearly fascinated by these aspects, from the First World War, to the rules, manners and etiquette of the Edwardian society that have such a huge impact on the development of the storylines. Alongside posts and discussions about these features of the series,⁴² there are also websites dedicated to the series’ historical period.⁴³

On the other hand, Monk insists on the “quality value,” which can be epitomized by fans’ engagement with the visual aspects of the films. In *Downton* elements such as settings, decor, period furniture and objects and, mostly, fashion, are invaluable assets that arrest the nitpicking attention of fans. We could even affirm that the continuous exchange of images and GIFs on Tumblr can be entirely considered a general appraisal for *Downton*’s visual pleasures, especially the costumes. Fans are quite obsessed with the female cast’s outfits and frocks: they daily post sets of pictures of a specific dress or the costumes of a character during an episode. Sometimes, they engage in background research the vintage pieces used by the costume department. There is even a blog dedicated solely to the lamps used in the show with references to actual antiques.⁴⁴

There are specific Tumblr blogs dedicated to the show’s fashion, such as downton-is-life.tumblr.com and styleatdownton.tumblr.com. On *YouTube*, there are 44 tutorials made by fans on how to reproduce the look, makeup and hairstyles of the Crawley sisters. During the live-tweet of the premiere many tweets were dedicated to Lady Mary’s wedding dress and about 1000 tweets referred directly to fashion: “I just love the period clothing on Downton Abbey. Makes me feel under-dressed just watching it!”⁴⁵

Life is a game where one must look ridiculous. The Silliness mode

Lastly, we want to point out an aspect that is not linked to a specific factor of interest but is more a “modality” of fan behavior. During the last twenty years of the fan studies debate, presented as a semiotic resistance to the top-down content imposed by “The Powers That Be”, the other modes by which fans interact with their object of affection have often tended to be neglected. One is what we have called the Silliness mode. Fans’ appraised encyclopedic knowledge and expertise about

their favorite show, and their ability to handle its intra-textual and meta-textual elements, can also be found in more whimsical and spirited activities made just for fun.

In the case of *Downton* we have blogs that feature the adventures of puppet-versions of characters as Mr. Bates (everyonelovesavalet.tumblr.com) and Mrs. Hughes (mrshughesadventures.tumblr.com) pictured “on tour” in different locations.

There are any kind of mash-up blogs, from *Telegrams from Downton*, that combine pictures of *Downton* characters and sexually explicit text messages, to a long list of blogs that mash-up *Downton* with other television series such as *Abbey of Thrones*, *Downton Greendale*, *Arrested Downton*, and so on.⁴⁶ The same principle of playfully combining elements can be seen in fan-videos that mix content from the series with other media text or that play with genre conventions and codes. Among the most viewed fanvids we can find a *Downton Abbey-Mean Girls Trailer*,⁴⁷ and several *Downton Abbey* horror/suspense videos⁴⁸ that build alternate narratives for the show.

Maybe the most peculiarly bizarre activity of all is the “Free Bates” movement.⁴⁹ It started at the end of season 2 when Mr. Bates was convicted for a murder he did not commit. Fans built and promoted the liberation campaign first with graphic manipulations and GIFs, then with actual merchandise such as signs to be used during marches, mugs and t-shirts with “Free Bates” printed on them. The campaign rapidly went viral as members of the cast started to wear the “Free Bates” pins and t-shirts in public events.

Don't be defeatist, dear, it's terribly middle class. My fandom is better than yours

We have conducted this survey trying to find what – from a fan’s perspective – differentiates *Downton* from other shows and what peculiar features attract so many viewers to this “normal classic period drama.” Still, our research did not stumble upon any activity or fan behavior that might be considered exclusively pertinent to this show and its fandom. *Downton*’s fans engage in many kinds of fanworks and make extensive use of every digital tool they might have access to. In opposition to other viewers or the so-called “anti-fans,” *Downtonians* defend the qualities of their beloved *show*, its script, its author and its actors with passionate arguments and engage in playful and quirky activities that are signals of their familiarity with the text. But, as stated above, such enhanced interest is not limited to *Downton*’s fandom and is noticeable in most contemporary TV-series fandoms, especially those that can benefit from an “historical setting.” Doubtless *Downton*’s creators and show runners have managed to build a truly solid product, which has both a fortunate and carefully crafted intersection of features and pleasures largely due to its “heritage status.”

So, how can *Downton*, a superb production yet hardly different than many series airing nowadays, be significant in a more general evaluation of the contemporary television environment and, specifically, of European productions? Could its situation throw some light on the current condition of a globally growing media environment and fandom?

In the *Downton* case we have different national broadcasting conditions and timing worldwide. For example, in the US, season 3 aired in January 2013, more than three months after the UK premiere. However, if we observe Tumblr blogs and posts, this delay did not seem to bother US fandom which obviously watched the third season by other means (peer-to-peer downloading as well as live-stream and streaming links online). Every Sunday, UK’s “Downton Day,” during the

hours preceding the show, the flow of posts on Tumblr is filled of live-stream links posted by users for the behalf of non-UK viewers. In Italy, the first season was broadcasted after a considerable delay in the spring of 2012, almost a year and a half later, on a minor channel, and virtually not advertised. The episodes aired together two per evening and in some cases were even shortened. The ratings were extremely low and the second season has not aired yet. However, even if viewers should be one season and a half behind, and so far exposed to a censored and mutilated version of the series, Italy has a particularly active Italian online-fandom. A young Italian woman runs some of the most viewed and important websites for *Downton* fandom, such as downtonline.com and michelle-dockery.com. There are Italian blogs and a website (downtonabbeyfansite.net) dedicated to the series, and many widely viewed fanvideos have been made by Italian vidders.

This situation is, again, by no means different from other acclaimed series and is a symptom of a paradigm of TV watching that has already changed forever: fandom is no longer linked to its country's regular broadcasting network as the only provider of the object of its affection. And, especially for young audiences, the series geographical origin does not make any difference when it comes to the consumption and appreciation of the product, nor does it affect these viewers' involvement within the fandom.

Some last remarks about *Downton* as cult TV-series.

Our findings regarding *Downton* fandom proves the series to be a "commercially driven TV drama which self-consciously draws on discourses of authorship, sophistication, and quirkiness which have been more traditionally linked to cult TV in its telefantasy mode."⁵⁰ Hills argues that:

*concepts of "cult" and "mainstream" have started to break down and coalesce into new patterns of cultural meaning. Fan activities such as online posting and speculation, fiction-writing based on the originating TV show's characters, and textual interpretations revolving around specific characters and relationships, have all now begun to revolve around what might otherwise be thought of as "mainstream" TV shows.*⁵¹

While "elements of 'cult' and 'mainstream' TV are increasingly being re-articulated," we can draw from this a new "way of thinking about the new-media-driven rise in fan activities surrounding shows that would not conventionally have been thought of as 'cult'."⁵² Through this perspective, we might be able to clarify *Downton Abbey's* peculiar positioning in the cult media context and consider it a good example not only of the progressive fading of boundaries between niche fan activities and mainstream media consumption, but also of the emergence of a new kind of "Mainstream Cult Television," one that benefits from increasingly fewer geographic limitations.

- 1 Georg Szalai, "Downton Abbey' Season Three Debut on U.K.'s ITV," *The Hollywood Reporter*, 17 September 2012, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/downton-abbey-itv-uk-third-season-debut-ratings-399908>. All the internet links cited throughout this paper have been last visited on 8 October 2012.
- 2 Tim Kennealy, "Ratings: 'Downton Abbey' Season 2 Finale Gives PBS Best Numbers Since 2009," *The Wrap*, 23 February 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/23/idUS106622438720120223>.
- 3 "What's wrong with everyone in Britain? [...] How did ITV manage it? It is ITV, after all, home of *The X Factor* [...]. ITV does not do period dramas." See Matt Rudd, "Why Are So Many People Watching *Downton Abbey*?", in *Sunday Times*, 17 October 2010, p. 6.

- 4 To cite some of the most recent contributions to the field: Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures*, Routledge, London-New York 2002; Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2004; Mark Jancovich, James Lyons (eds.), *Quality Popular Television: Cult TV, the Industry and Fans*, BFI Publishing, London 2003; Stacey Abbott (ed.), *The Cult TV Book. Investigating Cult TV Series*, I.B.Tauris, London 2010; David Lavery (ed.), *The Essential Cult TV Reader*, The University Press of Kentucky, Lexington 2010.
- 5 Craig Glenday, Guinness World Records' editor-in-chief, assigning the award for the Most Critically Acclaimed Series of 2010, see <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/8762842/Guinness-Book-of-Records-Downton-Abbey-is-most-critically-acclaimed-show-on-television.html>.
- 6 Umberto Eco, *Casablanca: Cult Movies and Intertextual Collage*, in Id., *Travels in Hyperreality*, Picador, London 1987, p. 198.
- 7 Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, cit.
- 8 *Idem*, p. x.
- 9 *Idem*, p. xiv.
- 10 Aimee Lee Ball, "Pass the Tea and the Remote and Put on Your Tiaras," in *New York Times*, 18 January 2012, p. E1.
- 11 Its numbers were so unexpected that, for example, PBS had to arrange last-minute marketing strategies to promote it. "'Masterpiece' has stepped up promotions on Facebook and Twitter. [...] 'Masterpiece,' based at Boston's WGBH, can't afford to buy ads, but PBS is doing some advertising for 'Downton,' the only 'Masterpiece' show it is now promoting in that way. Still, come January, growth in the show's US audience will depend on word of mouth from passionate fans." See John Jurgensen, "Can a Costume Drama Keep its Cool?," *Wall Street Journal*, 2 December 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970204012004577070653368266084.html>.
- 12 Jill Vejnaska, "'Downton Abbey' Captivates Again: Atlanta Fans Flock to GPB for Peek at Series, Maggie Smith," in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 8 January 2012, p. E1.
- 13 Sarah Jane Griffiths, "The *Downton Abbey* 'Phenomenon'," *BBC*, 9 September 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/entertainment-arts-19468993>.
- 14 Brian Moylan, "Why everyone in the world would watch *Downton Abbey*," *Gawker*, 9 January 2012, <http://gawker.com/5874387/why-everyone-in-the-universe-should-watch-downton-abbey>.
- 15 See <http://www.cultbox.co.uk/component/tag/Downton-Abbey>.
- 16 Francesca Coppa, *A Brief History of Media Fandom*, in Karen Hellekson, Kristina Busse (eds.), *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet*, McFarland, Jefferson 2006, pp. 41-59.
- 17 See Neil Midgley, "*Downton Abbey*: The Underdog Bites Back," in *The Daily Telegraph*, 19 September 2011, p. 25.
- 18 "'Downton Abbey' is drawing a considerably younger audience than the 2010-2011 Masterpiece season average. By midway through the second season [...] the teen audience has grown 88 percent," PBS Announces MASTERPIECE CLASSIC *Downton Abbey*, Season 2 Finale Ratings End on a High Note, *PBS press release*, 23 February 2012, <http://www.pbs.org/about/news/archive/2012/downton-finale-ratings/>.
- 19 See Mark Jancovich, Nathan Hunt, *The Mainstream, Distinction, and Cult TV*, in Sara Gwenllian-Jones, Roberta E. Pearson (eds.), *Cult Television*, cit., p. 27.
- 20 Matt Hills, *Mainstream Cult*, in Stacey Abbott (ed.), *The Cult TV Book*, cit., pp. 67-73.
- 21 Tisha Turk, "Some thoughts about typical vs. unusual vids", *Talking with TV*, 16 March 2012, <http://tishaturk.dreamwidth.org/10902.html>.
- 22 YouTube videos and Twitter live-streaming were scraped using an open source network analysis tool for Excel, NodeXL, using specific keywords and tags to obtain relevant search results: <http://nodexl.codeplex.com/>.
- 23 The portal allows to search only by tags and it's not possible to quantify the number of results nor to search blogs by name or topics of interest.
- 24 Claire Monk, "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0: Period Film Audiences and Online Fan Cultures," in *Participation*, vol. 8, no. 2, November 2011, p. 455.
- 25 We have monitored the discussion from two hours before the airing of the show to the end of the episode.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE AN ENGLISH SUMMER, IS THERE?

- 26 That is to say object of fan-made videos.
- 27 "I must say the south of France is beautiful at this time of year. At least... the view has certainly improved since I was last in the country." Cpt. Matthew Crawley, 18 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/Captain-Crawley/status/248005678021611520>. "Many apologies for the twittergram silence on our honeymoon. The south of France is so beautiful – @CaptainCrawley & I've hardly had the time!" Lady Mary Crawley, 23 September 2012, https://twitter.com/Lady_M_Crawley/status/249840104879841281.
- 28 sophie gadd, 16 September 2012, https://twitter.com/sophie_gadd/status/247446402081361920.
- 29 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVMtffzbAwk>.
- 30 <https://twitter.com/LadyVGrantham>; <https://twitter.com/DowagerHeardIt>; <https://twitter.com/theladygrantham>.
- 31 Excerpt of a statement made by Tumblr user catchingbananas1, answering the question: "Why do you like *Downton Abbey*?" during the "20 Day Downton Abbey Challenge," 3 September 2012, <http://catchingbananas1.tumblr.com/post/30809884335/downton-abbey-challenge-day-7>.
- 32 Mark Jankovich, Nathan Hunt, *The Mainstream, Distinction and Cult TV*, cit., p. 30.
- 33 Khizzy Guevara, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/KyleKhizzGrayxo/status/247450207942479872>.
- 34 Adam Paylor, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/AdPaylor/status/247451776301797377>.
- 35 stylomatisch, *Downton Abbey (Series 2) – The Perfect Wave*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u7Y-CeFVBCpc>.
- 36 DarkAngelVampireOx, *Downton Abbey – Beyond Redemption x*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=id4XMCE-y5E>.
- 37 AmnotMexiCannot, *Thomas ~ Downton Abbey*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wuokxZps5pk>.
- 38 amyvs7, 12 September 2012, <http://amyvs7.tumblr.com/post/31414364521/downton-abbey-challenge>.
- 39 Danielle, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/poisonouslies/status/247441238758932481>.
- 40 Andrew Higson, *English Heritage, English Cinema: Costume Drama Since 1980*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2003, p. 1.
- 41 See Claire Monk, "Heritage Film Audiences 2.0", cit.; Claire Monk, *Heritage Film Audiences: Period Films and Contemporary Audiences in the UK*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2011.
- 42 Tumblr users frequently reblog and discuss *Huffington Post*'s explanations of the etiquette involved in each episodes, e.g. <http://you-had-me-at-downton.tumblr.com/tagged/Etiquette>.
- 43 E.g. <http://edwardianpromenade.com/downton-abbey-portal/>.
- 44 <http://downtonabbeylamps.tumblr.com/>.
- 45 Hannah Spowart, 16 September 2012, <https://twitter.com/HannahSpowart/status/247426682900869120>.
- 46 <http://telegramsfromdownton.tumblr.com>; <http://abbeyofthrones.tumblr.com>; <http://downtongreendale.tumblr.com>; <http://arresteddownton.tumblr.com>.
- 47 Dawnofthedusk, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pruPAzYPmu0&feature=youtube_gdata_player.
- 48 E.g. Sparallex, *Downton Abbey Horror/Suspense Trailer (Evil!Matthew)*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODI7n9Icgps>.
- 49 There are several blogs that keep up with the "Free Bates" movement; the most relevant one is <http://mrbateslegal.tumblr.com>.
- 50 Matt Hills, *Mainstream Cult*, cit., p. 73.
- 51 *Idem*, pp. 69-70.
- 52 *Idem*, p. 73.