

Class and the Domestic Service System

through *Downton Abbey*



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Abstract

During the Edwardian era domestic service witnessed a splendid time, which abruptly concluded after the Great War. After introducing the class system in the United Kingdom, focusing especially on the working classes, the present dissertation studies the situation of domestic service in Edwardian British society, as well as on its decay, through the analysis of the television show *Downton Abbey*. Research has been conducted following a textual analysis methodology within the field of cultural studies. The analysis of the show consists of two parts: (1) an overview of the position of the family members and domestic servants throughout the six seasons of the series, and (2) an in-depth analysis of episode one, season one. The findings of the present research demonstrate the TV series realistically reveals that situation of country-house domestic servants and the way they lived greatly evolved as society changed.

Durant el període eduardià el servei domèstic va viure una època d'esplendor que va finalitzar abruptament a l'acabament de la Primera Guerra Mundial. Després d'una breu introducció del sistema de classes britànic, prestant especial atenció a les classes treballadores, aquest treball es centra en la situació del servei domèstic de la societat britànica eduardiana i la seva decadència a través de l'anàlisi de la sèrie televisiva *Downton Abbey*. La recerca s'ha fet seguint una metodologia d'anàlisi textual dins del camp dels estudis culturals. L'anàlisi de la sèrie està dividit en dues parts: (1) un resum de la situació dels membres de la família i el servei domèstic al llarg de les sis temporades, i (2) una anàlisi exhaustiva del primer episodi. Els resultats d'aquesta investigació ens mostren que la sèrie reflexa de forma fidedigna el servei domèstic de les grans mansions britàniques i com van canviar les seves vides al mateix temps que la societat evolucionava.

Keywords: cultural studies, textual analysis, working classes, Edwardian domestic service, *Downton Abbey*, social-class system

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Introduction

The British social class system is one of the most characteristic traits of the country. Its evolution has been gradual and it is deeply embedded in the British character. Most societies are traditionally divided into different social strata. After presenting the birth and development of the working classes and the evolution, position and circumstances of domestic servants in history, the present study is focused on the British lower classes during the Edwardian era, especially taking into consideration country-house domestic servants, through the TV series *Downton Abbey* (ITV 2010-2016), subsequently referred to as *DA*. In this series, domestic servants can be observed in an aristocratic country-house environment. The aim of this analysis will be to reach conclusions about whether the series presents a realistic portrayal of the Edwardian period and the situation of domestic service within the working classes community as well as within society as a whole.

The primary sources used for the analysis include the six seasons of *DA* together with *Downton Abbey. The Complete Scripts – Season 1*. Moreover, an in-depth analysis of “Episode 1 – Season 1” is conducted to exemplify the way domestic servants are presented and their roles and position in the *Downton Abbey* household. Secondary sources have also been consulted to learn about the situation of servants in the United Kingdom and to enable me to provide the historical framework of this dissertation. This contextual historical introduction is divided into the following sections: (1) Brief History of the Social Classes in Britain, (2) The Birth and Evolution of the Working Classes until the Great War, (3) Domestic Service, and (4) Servants in Edwardian Large Households.

The present research is set in the field of cultural studies, which focuses on how cultural products can be used to understand past and present societies (Barker, 2002; Sefton-Green, 2011). Even though cultural products tell us things about our contemporary

world, they can also be windows to different times, as is the case of *DA*, which allows us to gain an insight into the hierarchical structure of country estates during Edwardian times. In order to analyse the data obtained from the TV series and the first episode, textual analysis is going to be used, a methodology which will enable me to reach an understanding of how aristocratic country houses were structured based on a close reading of the aspects depicted in the text, in this case *DA*.

1. Contextualization

1.1. Brief History of the Social Classes in Britain

The social history of any country is essential to fully understand its current social structure. Since the United Kingdom is no exception, it is necessary to briefly establish the foundations on which the Edwardian society was laid. From the feuds of the Middle Ages to the revolutionary working classes of the 19th century, an evolution can be appreciated. The Norman conquest of England in 1066 AD contributed to the creation of the basis of today's social structure. The Normans legally established solid boundaries between the nobility, the clergy and the peasants. The latter group comprised serfs and freemen even though freemen were less numerous (Cheyney, 1900; Fisher, 2003; Milsom, 1976). However, the bondage to the land gradually disappeared and by the end of the 16th century the mass of the English population were freemen (Cheyney, 1900).

By the 16th and 17th centuries, the feudal powers had been undermined, which contributed to the concentration of power in the hands of a few landowners (Lachmann, 1989: 147). The economy progressively evolved and traditional farming was substituted by land enclosures. In Medieval times, agriculture was based on large fields, known as open fields which were cultivated by individual farmers; however, this type of farming was not productive enough. Therefore, to achieve a higher productivity of the lands, the fields were enclosed with the support of landowners and the Parliament through the Enclosure Act in 1604 (UK Parliament). The land enclosures left many labourers without any means of subsistence. Some migrated to towns and others became beggars, who, prior to the Protestant Reformation, used to be assisted at religious houses. As a result, the government was forced to enact a series of laws to help the poor. The division of classes was extremely strict; consequently, it was almost impossible to climb up the social ladder, which contributed to the discontentment of the wealthy trading families. This situation did

not favour the nobility during the Civil War;¹ in fact, it only increased the differences between the two factions, the Cavaliers and the Roundheads, the first supporting the King and the monarchy and the later a republic led by the parliament (Fisher 2003; O'Farrell, 2007; Younger, 2007).

During the 18th century and the Industrial Revolution which followed the age of Enlightenment, the number of people working in the mechanized industry increased. Up until that moment, the majority of members of the lower classes worked the land with their families. However, the situation drastically changed during the 19th century, and by 1851 only one in ten people worked in agriculture (Hopkins, 1979: 3). Throughout the 19th century, an emerging new class, the working class, concentrated in dark industrial towns and cities while the middle and upper-classes fled from the crowded centres and settled in clean suburban neighbourhoods or country estates.

For this new and modern society, boundaries became extremely important, especially to protect the upper and middle-classes from the working classes, which they perceived as a threat. Consequently, class consciousness developed (Perkin, 1983: 167), dividing society into two great categories, “the property-owning “ruling class” that embraced aristocrats, capitalists, and professionals, and a largely property-less “working class” [...]” (Harris, 1993: 7). There also were internal divisions within the working classes, and the conditions in which workers had to perform their jobs and live their lives greatly varied. The legalization of the Trade Unions at the end of the century would mean an improvement in working conditions and the achievement of certain rights, such as the introduction of safety measures at work or the establishment of the minimum working age.

¹ The English Civil War took place between 1642 and 1646 confronting the Cavaliers, supporters of the nobility and the crown, and the Roundheads, supporters of a republic which would be commanded by the Parliament. Many factors led to the start of the war, especially the conflicts between the King and the Parliament. Nevertheless, other social aspects were determinant for the outbreak of the war, such as religious disagreements between the Anglican Church and the Puritan sectors that controlled the Parliament, as well as animosity between the bourgeoisie and the landed gentry (Bearman and Deane, 1992: 32; O'Farrell, 2007: 188).

At the dawn of 1914, the old world-order crumbled down and, for a period of 40 years, the country witnessed wars, economic depressions and reconstructions following the blitz that took place during the Second World War. During the 1950s stability and prosperity returned (Bédarida, 1979: 167). During this new period, living standards increased and the working classes started to change. Though they fiercely fought for their rights in the 1960s and 1970s, the sense of belonging to the working classes gradually disappeared and was substituted for middle-class aspirations. From 1979 onwards, the government promoted the ownership of houses and enacted the Housing Bill, allowing council housing tenants to buy their homes (Jones, 2012: 60). Margaret Thatcher's government encouraged individuals to look for their own interests and not for those of the collective. Thatcher and her conservative government embodied the fear of the wealthy classes of organized and belligerent workers. By promoting neoliberalism,² conservative governments advocated for a “contemporary working class [...] marked by its privatisation [...]” and controlled through “extra-home/nuclear family social relations in the course of ordinary, every-day life” (Procter, 1990: 159). Therefore, it may be argued that today's working classes are numerous and varied though weak and divided.

1.2. The Birth and Evolution of the Working Classes until the Great War

The term “class” or “classes” started being used at the beginning of the 19th century and became more popular by the 1830s creating the well-known associations of words “working class” or “middle class”. These new terms gave expression to the new consciousness of class, one which followed different interests from the old aristocracy system. The new coinages, which were used to refer to different social classes, did not mean these classes had not existed prior to the Industrial Revolution. British society

²Neoliberalism, ideology and policy model that emphasizes the value of free market competition. (Smith, 2016. <<http://bit.ly/1UbY8Bz>>)

during the 18th century was also strictly divided into different social strata. Consequently, the country was highly hierarchical and people's social position rarely changed. The idea of belonging was firmly promoted and people were taught to know their places in this class-conscious society (Bédarida, 1979: 3640; Perkin, 1983). With the Industrial Revolution, new forms of employment appeared and with them a new class coinage was born, the industrial working class. These ideas are reflected in the following quote:

Up to then the typical working man lived in the country, and he worked on the land, together with his wife and children. Industrial occupations existed, of course, but they accounted for only a minority of workers when compared with agriculture. All this changed dramatically in the first half of the nineteenth century, and was already changing when the 1811 census was taken. (Hopkins, 1979:2)

By 1811, only a third of the population was engaged in agriculture (Buer 1921:159; Hopkins, 1979:2). The new working class was a heterogeneous group that primarily lived in the new industrial towns of the country. The new factory system was unknown for the population as well as for the government. Factory and workshop owners were mainly concerned about the profits of their businesses and not about the working or living conditions of their employees. The economic growth of the country undoubtedly benefited the government; therefore, during the first decades following the Industrial Revolution, the government tended to follow *laissez-faire*³ policies, especially in economic matters.

During the first half of the century the Napoleonic Wars took place. They finished in 1815, which led to a time of depression, especially in agriculture and industry. With the end of the Napoleonic Wars, the British industry expected a rise in the demands for manufactured goods. These demands did not take place due to the impoverished

³ According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, laissez-faire is a policy of minimum governmental interference in the economic affairs of individuals and society. ("Laissez-faire" <<http://bit.ly/26qz8LK>>)

situation of the European countries. The low demand for British products in Europe and the cessation of food and clothes purchases from the British government led to a reduction of prices. Unemployment increased with the rapid demobilization of the army and the navy since men were looking for jobs at a time when there was less need for manpower due to the increasing mechanisation of industry. These conditions inevitably contributed to the appearance of an economic recession (Buer, 1921:160-162). By the 1820s and 1830s, the industry recovered and continued growing. Agriculture took longer to recover but eventually became profitable by the 1830s. However, in 1836 the economy experienced a deep depression which would last for a period of three years. The technological advances of the railway system and the steamship facilitated international commerce and brought Britain back to prosperity in the late 1840s (Buer, 1921:165; Hopkins, 1979:1-100).

By 1851, there were four times as many industrial workers as there were agricultural workers. However it should be noted that less than a quarter of those industrial workers were actually employed in the factory system we nowadays know. The rest of them were largely employed in workshops,⁴ which varied in size and working conditions. Small workshops were generally set up in a domestic environment, which increased the difficulties for the government to control the working conditions. Family workshops were constituted by a man, his wife, and the children they might have. The average working hours in a workshop was around twelve hours a day, with an hour and a half off for meals (Hopkins, 1979: 2-16). For today's standards, workshops were filthy and dangerous working environments where workers had to devote an inhuman amount of hours to their jobs, especially children as there was not much regulation about the minimum working age.

⁴ Factories and workshops were largely differentiated due to their size and the quantity of products made. Workshops were more traditional places of work where most of the production was carried manually with little assistance of machines. Factories at the time were bigger and more mechanized, which allowed the owner to get more benefits with a larger production without employing as many workers.

During the early Victorian period, it can be observed that there was not a homogenous working class, one which would encompass the whole of the lower classes. People were employed in workshops of all sizes, as well as on mines and textile factories. In spite of the low numbers of factory workers, they started to acquire a sense of identity, a consciousness of class, which would distinguish them from other lower class workers such as agriculture workers or domestic service.

The living conditions in the first half of the century varied in great measure depending on the income of the families. The more skilled the worker was, the better did the family live. Generally, skilled workers earned a higher salary which would enable the family to live in decent houses and have better food. However, if the skilled worker died or lost his job, the household's living conditions would not be much different from the ones of lower-income families, whose housing and living conditions could be dreadful. During the 19th century, industrial towns rapidly grew and followed the same insanitary conditions of the previous century. Slum areas with poor or no drainage and leaky privies would cause the rapid spread of dangerous diseases. Mortality rates were considerably high, especially affecting the working classes from industrial towns (Hopkins 1979:17-31).

Some sections of the middle and upper-classes regarded the working classes from a paternalistic perspective and thought they should be, to a certain degree, helped. The government and local authorities started improving the living conditions of workers in industrial towns. Health commissions were appointed, the first in 1844. Not all towns and neighbourhoods, however, were in a state of degradation as in many cases strong-minded landlords or concerned local administrations would provide ameliorations to make the living conditions of workers less outrageous. They also promoted private acts of

parliament⁵ to be passed in order to improve the conditions in which workers lived (Hopkins, 1979:20-23; Treble, 1983:13-39).

From the 1850s onwards, the situation progressively started improving for the working classes. At least, several acts were passed during the first half of the century in an attempt to regulate the minimum age and working hours in certain jobs. However, these acts were not always effective. Some of the first long-fought milestones were the Factory Acts in 1844, 1850 and 1853. The attempt to control the employment of children in factories actually brought a shorter day for all classes of workers in factories and a more exhaustive control of the working conditions for all workers.

Since children were working at the factories from a very young age, no attempts were made during the first half of the century to implement basic mandatory education for the working classes. From the government's perspective, the working classes did not need anything but the basic three Rs⁶ to be content and accept their role and place established by society. Families were always in need of more income and children were put to work as soon as it was allowed.

During the second half of the century, further reform was conducted. During the 1860s and 1870s the limitation of working hours for children and women were established for the rest of industries besides factories. Different acts, especially the 1867 Workshop Act, facilitated the establishment of an efficient system of inspection. At the turn of the century, the 1901 Factories and Workshops Act was passed and it consolidated the reforms even further. For instance, the minimum working age was raised to 12 years old, fire escapes were required and meal times were controlled. Safety measures were

⁵ “Private Bills are usually promoted by organisations, like local authorities or private companies, to give themselves powers beyond, or in conflict with, the general law. Private Bills only change the law as it applies to specific individuals or organisations, rather than the general public. Groups or individuals potentially affected by these changes can petition Parliament against the proposed Bill and present their objections to committees of MPs and Lords.” (UK Parliament <<http://bit.ly/1beGwK9>>)

⁶ Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic

implemented at work, especially in dangerous jobs such as mining. The Workman's Compensation Act in 1906 guaranteed a compensation pay to any workman who suffered an illness or an injury which had been caused due to unsafe or unhealthy working conditions.

At the end of the century, the situation had improved from the 1850s as wages boards were appointed and the working hours for the large majority of men were around 11, including meals. The work week was from Monday to Saturday and most trades would only work half of the day on Saturday. Moreover, the Bank Holiday Acts in the 1870s guaranteed at least four days a year of holiday, though at that time it was not unusual for skilled workers to enjoy a week of rest during the year. The expansion of the railway enabled the working classes to spend a cheap day at the seaside and enjoy some leisure moments.

The living conditions during the second half of the 19th century significantly improved from the ones of the first half of the century. This evolution was not sudden and reforms were gradually implemented throughout the century. The situation in the slum areas of industrial towns was a problem for the government as the areas had a high mortality rate. The dwellings of the working classes lacked certain facilities which are nowadays taken for granted. There was no tap water, most families lived in a small and crowded space and drainage in the streets was close to non-existent. Cross's Housing Act in 1875 was crucial as it allowed the government to demolish extremely defective slum properties and forced slum landlords to improve their buildings.

By 1914, the battle had been won and drainage in industrial towns was implemented. The housing situation varied from one place to another, though. Despite the reforms, slum areas still existed in big cities. Nevertheless, slum buildings were progressively removed and old tenements which were too decayed would enter the slum

category. The health services of the nation improved greatly and not only did the number of hospitals increase, but the new medical discoveries started transforming traditional medicine. More attention was given to individual health, which meant the population started to be conscious of the benefits of hygiene and healthy exercise.

1.3. Domestic Service

Industrial workers have traditionally been identified as the working class of the 19th century, but in fact the working classes were heterogeneous and dynamic. New forms of employment appeared during the century and industrial workers developed a collective sense of belonging. Domestic service members were considered part of the lower classes; nevertheless, they did not fit in the new industrial community. The nature of domestic service was not static and throughout time, its members and the conditions in which they worked and lived evolved as society changed.

During medieval and Tudor times, country households were more inclined to have a semi-public nature. They were hierarchical in nature but with stronger bonds and more intimate relationships between masters and servants. The medieval and Tudor household servants were expected to provide protection and comfort to aristocratic families (Mertes, 1981). As Musson writes, “The numbers involved in these households right up to the sixteenth century could be breath-taking” (2009: 17); however, royal households would be even more impressive and superior in number.

Up until the seventeenth century, there was little division between ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’. For instance, the main access of country-houses would go through the servants’ domains. Moreover, every member of the household would dine together in the great hall. The family would generally be served by the leading house officers, who in turn would be served by lower servants. In some cases, senior servants with positions of

authority would be knights or come from minor nobility families. The larger and more numerous the households were the more powerful the image the family projected (Musson, 2009:16-50; Mertes, 1981:1-17, 73-119). Domestic servants during medieval and Tudor times generally lived more comfortable and healthier lives than other fellow peasants. Servants were fed daily and lived under the protection of the master, who helped them avoid the hunger and miseries many farming families endured.

Throughout the 17th century, a greater emphasis was placed on professional domestic servants, whereas gentle-born attendants no longer had a role within the gradually smaller households. Nevertheless, certain positions such as stewards or governesses were expected to be held by men and women from superior backgrounds. By the end of the century, the outlay of houses changed and separate servants' halls appeared. Since families wanted to establish less intimate contact with lower servants, the provision in the attics for servants' sleeping garrets became more common (Musson, 2009: 52). This sort of accommodation was not ideal and, as time went by, dampness would become an issue. Later on, large landowners would renovate the servants' quarters during the 18th and 19th century (Musson, 2009: 210). During the 19th and 20th century innovative technological inventions would be used to improve the servants' quarters. The most important of them was the implementation of a bell board which would facilitate servants' lives.

Up until the 17th century, women barely had important roles in the immense medieval household staff as servants were expected to assist and protect the family. During this century, women were able to take more senior housekeeping duties and the importance of educated housekeepers and governesses was established. For instance Hannah Wolley's guide (1675) established that "[t]hey who undertake the difficult Employ of being an Instructress or Governess of Children should be persons of no mean

birth and breeding, civil in deportment, and of an extraordinary winning and pleasing conversation”.⁷ Therefore, we can observe that a firm line was established between uneducated servants and educated servants. Gradually, the roles and behaviour of servants resembled those found in the 19th and early 20th century. Staff members were gradually expected to imitate their superiors in manners and speech, especially senior servants.

During the 18th century, political stability and the beginnings of the Industrial Revolution favoured the fortunes of some large landowners, who more than ever could sustain a surprisingly large number of servants (Musson, 2009: 91). In fact, it should be taken into account that “[...] aristocratic households had, on average, nearly five times as many live-in servants as all other households at the beginning of the eighteenth century and around 12 times as many at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Field, 2013: 252). Servants in larger households tended to be more specialized and educated; thus they earned higher wages than servants from smaller households. Nevertheless, the majority of domestic servants were women, who worked in smaller houses and served as maids-of-all-work. Therefore, the tendency changed from the middle ages and the domestic staff was comprised by a female majority.

The 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century witnessed an increase in the numbers of servants. Domestic service was in 1851 the second major form of employment after agriculture with 1.039.000 employees; and by 1901, the number had increased to 2 million servants (Hopkins, 1979:2; Musson, 2009: 7). It was considered to be the largest form of employment for British women. By 1911, the census accounted for 1.3 million, which outnumbered the 1.2 million from agriculture. As the numbers of servants increased, well-trained and high-ranking country-house servants were looked on as representatives of good servants. From the middle-classes upwards, a domestic servant

⁷ The guide was digitally printed in 1997 in the Emory Women Writers Resource Project, Emory University. <<http://bit.ly/1UeaQzS>>

was at least expected. In upper-middle class households a housekeeper was generally required together with one or two housemaids who would help her to clean and cook.

Throughout the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries, to go into service would be an escape route from the hardships of agriculture or industries. Servants were usually provided with decent accommodation, food and good wages. Taking into account the fact that servants did not generally have many expenses, it was relatively easy for them to save money for their future retirement. So, at the end of the 19th century, though servants worked longer hours than factory and workshop workers, they lived considerably better.

Lower-rank servants, who entered into service at a very young age, generally had to send their entire wages to support their families. The main difficulty for young girls was to buy their first maid uniform, which was a requirement for many families. Many of them would work for two or three years in miserable jobs to save enough money. Young boys were generally given the livery uniform and only had to pay for the undergarments. Moreover, letters of recommendation were required for most positions, which might have impeded young inexperienced servants from accessing good positions. Most female lower-rank servants did not normally remain in domestic service all their lives and retired in their early 20s to get married and start a family. Fewer times, housemaids remained in service, eventually becoming housekeepers or lady's maids. However, it should be taken into account that lady's maids were expected to be in their mid-twenties. Once they overcame this barrier, their annual salary began to decrease, especially in the area of London, where competition was fierce and specialized servants were in high demand and better paid in comparison to country-house servants. With regards to young boys, they generally remained in service all their lives.

Senior servants enjoyed more privileges than lower-rank servants. For instance, senior servants in large houses would be served by lower-rank servants. In most country-

houses, the kitchen staff could not dine with the others in the servants' hall but had to serve them. Senior servants would enjoy the best rooms among servants or even a set of rooms, like in the case of housekeepers, who enjoyed two rooms, one devoted to sleep and the other where they dealt with the matters of the house or enjoyed a cup of tea with other senior servants. In most houses, there were certain privileges enjoyed by all the staff. Generally, servants had an afternoon off a week and could attend mass with the family on Sundays. The 16-hour working days together with the lack of free time were the reasons why servants could not spend much of their wages. Thus, it was not an uncommon practice during the 19th century until the Edwardian era to provide generous quantities of food, sugar, tea and beer to domestic servants as they were more satisfactory than cash payments (Maloney, 2013: 46). For instance, the Lancashire home of a wealthy family, Leighton Hall, recorded in 1893 the quantity of beer pints the staff members were allowed to drink (see Table 1). The servants' living conditions, from the lowest to the highest, were generally decent. They lived in hygienic rooms and were given good quality food.

As stated, servants could save all or most of their yearly wage, which varied depending on their position (see Table 2). Nevertheless, many times male senior servants were married and had children, which meant they could not save as much as single servants. Though senior servants came from all over Britain (Arthur, 2006), "many servants in country-houses were related, either by being married to other servants or through the marriages of their children" (Musson, 2009: 194). With regards to female senior servants their situation was slightly different. In the case of governesses, they generally came from a good family but for different reasons they had to work and earn a living. If they were unmarried, women at the time depended on the charity of brothers or sisters. However, not all families could afford to economically support another member; therefore, in such cases, women had to look for a respectable form of employment. In

contrast, housekeepers could come from two kinds of backgrounds. As members of the working classes, many young girls entered into service to escape from the misery of farms or factories and some stayed, eventually becoming housekeepers without ever marrying. On other occasions, middle-class or upper-middle-class widows were forced by circumstances to find a job. Since they were experienced in the management of a house, they could opt for the position of housekeepers.

At the moment of their retirement, servants needed to have some savings to avoid living in workhouses, a common fear during the 19th century which persisted during the 20th. In any case, servants who spent most of their lives working for one single family were generally given annuities or legacies at the moment of the lord's death. Therefore, though the majority of senior servants were of humble origins, at the end of their lives, thanks to their savings, they could consider the possibility of owning a proper home and living the life of a middle-class family.

During the 19th century, the majority of industrial workers acknowledged the privilege of working in service, especially in country-houses or upper-class and aristocratic households. Life expectancy among industrial workers was definitely lower compared to high-rank domestic servants. Consequently, even though they despised the excessive servility of domestic servants' lives, they envied their health and status. Having said that, by the end of the century, working conditions in factories and workshops were not as extreme and dangerous as they were at the beginning of the century. At the dawn of the Great War, shops were a growing business and, together with offices, they offered better employment conditions for the younger generations. Pay demands had increased among the lower classes and it was starting to be difficult for families to employ large quantities of servants.

During the 19th century, most domestic servants worked for middle-class or upper-middle-class families who, at the beginning of the 20th century, could no longer afford the wage of a single maid. In 1911, the National Insurance tax was established and both mistress and maid had to contribute 3d⁸ a week to cover any potential illnesses. By that time, big houses were forced to reduce the number of staff as their expenses had increased but their incomes had remained the same. However, it was the outbreak of the First World War that dealt the *coup de grâce* to the domestic service system of life. Young male servants were requested to enrol in the army and women found themselves filling the vacancies they had left. At end of the war, men and women were no longer inclined to continue in such enslaving jobs as they had more attractive opportunities to work in offices where the hours were not so demanding and wages were higher (Maloney, 2013: 178-181). Though the number of servants was still high (Horn, 2003: 12), it gradually decreased since there was a wider employment offer. Moreover, the implementation of technological advances and the use of electrical appliances such as fridges, washing machines or dishwashers at home decreased the need of a large household staff. From then onwards, most houses employed a reduced number of external staff.

1.4. Servants in Edwardian Large Households

After this exploration of the general situation of industrial workers and servants, the focus of the following part is the situation of domestic servants in large households during the Edwardian era. Until the First War World, the country-house system of life enjoyed its golden era. Domestic service was at that time an excellent way of avoiding the miseries of the time and country-house servants were the elite of this collective.

⁸ 'd' is the abbreviation for pence. The pre-decimal system, which was in use until 1971, used the abbreviation *£sd* to refer to pounds, shillings and pence. These abbreviations came from the Roman Empire's coinage system, *libra*, *solidus* and *denarius*. The first recorded use was in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1387. ("The Origins of £Sd" <<http://bit.ly/26qz8LK>>)

Clear boundaries can be observed in upper-class and upper-middle-class Edwardian households. Though senior servants might have had a closer relationship with the family, they all knew their place and the lines between ‘upstairs’ and ‘downstairs’ were never blurred (Maloney, 2013: 17). Nevertheless, the separation was not only for class purposes but also to avoid any romantic relationships between the family and the domestic staff, which actually was more common than the records show (Musson, 2009: 181). As was usual at the time, separate rooms were also assigned to female and male servants since fraternization was not allowed. Servants were not forbidden to have relationships, but separate rooms were deemed necessary to follow the morality of the time.

Edwardian households, like in the previous century, were composed by a majority of female staff. However, the highest positions for servants were reserved to males:

Although the Edwardian era saw the rise of the suffragettes, and women servants outnumbered men by three to one, life below stairs was still a male-dominated hierarchy with a butler or manservant given greater authority, and therefore higher pay, than a housekeeper. This also meant that the ability to maintain a manservant or butler was looked upon as an enviable badge of wealth. (Maloney, 2013:18)

Middle-class houses could not afford the employment of a butler and the housekeeper would be considered the ruler of the ‘downstairs’ staff. In larger houses, the staff could work inside or outside. Inside the house, the housekeeper would be in command of staff responsible of the cleaning and the laundry. The serving staff had to respond to the butler. Finally, the kitchen staff would be under the orders of the cook or the chef. With regards to the outdoor staff, there would be the head gardener, with some groundsmen under him. A coachman could also be found at the end of the 19th century in

most upper-class and aristocratic households. Nevertheless, with the new fashionable vehicles, coachmen would soon be replaced by chauffeurs who also acted as car mechanics.

The household was highly hierarchical and all servants were expected to know their position when talking to a fellow servant or a member of the family (See Picture 1). Scullery maids and maids-of-all-work were the youngest servants, often children of twelve or thirteen. Early in the morning until bed time, they were under the orders and snobbery of higher-rank servants. In many cases, younger servants, who came from extremely poor families, were mistreated by their superior fellows. Scullery maids were in charge of all the washing and cleaning in the kitchen, while maids-of-all-work were generally found in smaller households and were expected to perform any duties assigned to them, from lighting the fires to cleaning the rooms. Kitchen maids were the closest assistants of cooks and they were supposed to prepare all the ingredients before the cook started the meal. They would also be in charge of preparing coffee and easier items like toasts or sandwiches. In case there was not a scullery maid employed, kitchen maids would assume all the other tasks. They were also expected to serve fellow domestic staff members during meal breaks.

Parlour maids and chamber maids were found in large houses during the 19th century. Nevertheless, as staffs shrunk during the 20th century, both jobs were combined into one: the housemaids. If the family could afford it, there would be two or three housemaids, whose roles would differ depending on their rank. Originally parlour maids were assigned the cleaning of the reception rooms of the house, such as the drawing room, dining room, morning room and library. The duties of chambermaids were similar but they worked in the family private area, where they lit fires, made beds, cleaned rooms and dusted under beds. They were also in charge of carrying buckets of hot water and tea trays

to family and guests. The lowest housemaids were also expected to clean the rooms of those above them in rank.

During the 19th century, large households employed between two to four footmen, though more were employed in the grandest houses. On the mistress' evening outings, one or two livered footmen accompanied her to hold her the door of the carriage and carried any purchases she might acquire. At least another footman would stay at home to run any errands and open the door to any callers. During meals, footmen were expected to serve the table under the attentive eye of the butler. At the beginning of the new century, the footman's functions were close to non-existent. The need of sending messages on foot disappeared when telephones were introduced and chauffeurs replaced footmen on journeys and evening outings. Like maids-of-all-work, hallboys came from humble origins and used to be the servants of servants. "[They were] at the beck and call of the butler and footmen at all times" (Maloney, 2013: 41). However, at the beginning of the century, their functions, like those of footmen's, started to be ornamental.

Senior servants, like cooks, housekeepers, nurses and governesses, lady's maids, valets, and butlers, enjoyed more privileges as well as more responsibilities. Two types of cooks could be found in larger households: professional cooks for special events, and plain cooks for everyday life. "For families who could only afford one cook, an all-rounder was sought, though it was not always found" (Maloney, 2013: 36). Cooks could be as tyrannical as many housekeepers and kept the kitchen under control. Sometimes cooks and housekeepers would collide as the first was in charge of the food and the second was in charge of jams and preserves. Between meals, cooks would prepare as much food in advance as possible since at that time most ingredients were prepared from scratch. The cook would prepare the menus, which would be discussed with the mistress daily.

Housekeepers were in command of the kitchen staff and the maids, with the assistance of cooks and head housemaids. They were generally experienced middle-aged women who were addressed as Mrs, no matter their marital status. They would greet the family when they returned home from journeys as well as any weekend guests. They would show the guests to the rooms and take care they were well assisted. Housekeepers controlled storerooms, the china and the linen cupboards, so they used to carry the keys hanging from their belt. Housekeepers were often more feared than mistresses or even butlers.

During the 19th, Victorian society members employed nurses and governesses to take care and educate their children. Children were very fragile since infant mortality was extremely high. In large houses, nurses generally had the help of nursemaids, who were not much older than the children they were serving. Governesses were generally hired to give some basic education to boys, who would rapidly be sent to prestigious boarding schools such as Eton. Girls were mostly educated at home and they would be taught the basics to perform in society. Governesses generally came from superior backgrounds and did not quite fit in the domestic staff. They were generally in between the staff and the family, so they were not seen as domestic servants but were not part of the family either.

Lady's maids and valets were specialized servants that not many people could afford. Though in theory they responded to the housekeeper and the butler respectively, they also enjoyed a position of respect and fear from other servants as they had the masters' favour. They were expected to help their masters to get dressed and meet all their needs, which would encompass from taking care of the wardrobe to styling their hair. They had to know and to be able to put in practice the latest beauty and dressing fashions. Since their masters enjoyed a varied social life, they were expected to wait late at night and get up before them. Both lady's maids and valets enjoyed perks in the shape of tips or

old dresses from their masters. At the beginning of the 20th century, only the grandest of families would enjoy the employment of lady's maids and valets. The daughters of the house would generally share a lady's maid or maybe their mother's lady's maid.

Last but not least, butlers were the head of the household staff. In smaller houses with no valets, the butlers would assume their roles. In larger houses, whenever a guest arrived without a valet, the butler would assume the role. Butlers were expected to run the domestic staff and directly oversaw footmen and hall staff. They were also held responsible for their staff's behaviour, which led them to be rather strict. They were also in charge of the wine cellar and polished the family silver. Before dinners, butlers were required to set the starter on the table before calling the family. During dinners, butlers served the family and their guests while keeping an eye on footmen to make sure everything followed the correct etiquette. On special occasions, butlers even oversaw menus to have everything under control. At lunch, butlers might serve food on their own as footmen were generally occupied with other businesses. As a mark of respect, other servants would refer to the butler as 'sir' (Maloney, 2013:17-41)

2. Introduction to *Downton Abbey*

The analysis section of my research project is divided into two main parts. The first is an introduction to the TV show *DA* and a general portrayal of the Grantham family and the servants in the eponymous country house depicted in the series, which consists of six seasons. The second one is a thorough analysis of the pilot episode focusing on its portrayal of the Edwardian domestic service.

The show follows the lives of the Grantham family and their servants at the fictitious country estate Downton Abbey, in Yorkshire. The *DA* household showcases the grandeur of Edwardian country-houses and, as the series develops, the audiences are shown their decay and eventual disappearance.

The world of *DA* was created by Julian Fellowes and saw the light in 2010. The creator grew up at a time when the aristocracy had lost its value and power. The large country houses, which held parties and witnessed the lives of the nobility, had decayed and were forgotten. However, during the last decades, television has focused its attention on the nostalgic recreation of history. According to Erll, “television has a tendency to personalize history; [...] it creates intimacy and immediacy, which involves viewers in the historical matters represented” (2011: 139). *DA*, which belongs to the period drama genre, fascinates the audiences not only because of its dramatic intricacy, the beautiful scenery or the sumptuous costumes, but also, as Jessica Fellowes points out, because of “the fact that [audiences] are experiencing something of how life was a hundred years ago” (2011: 14).

The splendid world of *DA* was carefully researched and faithfully based on the life in British country houses between 1912 and 1926. However, as Jessica Fellowes explains in her book, “for all that is real about it, the compelling fact is that *every single* element you watch on screen is a figment of imagination” (2011: 266; emphasis in the original). Period drama shows use elements of reality to create a realistic picture of what

life might have been like in the past. Every detail is essential to convey a sense of time and place. From the furniture to the actresses' make up, everything is thoroughly planned.

However, the success of a show would not have been possible without the outstanding performances of the actors and actresses (see Table 3). The choice of the cast was meticulously organized; their origins and accents were taken into account. For instance, lower-rank servants needed to have a Yorkshire accent as most of them would have been locals at that time. Other servants, especially senior servants, might have come from other parts of Britain, like Phyllis Logan (Mrs. Hughes) with her Scottish accent or Dubliner Allen Leech (Tom Branson) with his Irish pronunciation. The creator of the series also wanted the location to be as faithful as possible to the reality of country-house life during the Edwardian period. Consequently, he chose an adequate setting, Highclere Castle, the real Downton Abbey, which is located 60 miles away from London and whose history is rich in stories. The Castle served as inspiration to Fellows to create the show. Its history can be traced back to Iron Age early settlements. The present building was designed during the late 18th and early 19th centuries following a Georgian style. Throughout the century, reformations were carried out to increase the grandeur of the mansion and adapt it to new times. Unfortunately, like most country-houses, the servant quarters and attics were completely reformed as times changed. To film the series, realistic Edwardian servant quarters were created in the London Ealing studios. The situation produced an interesting feeling to actors and actresses who played servant roles as they were unaccustomed to be at Highclere Castle. Consequently, the splendour of the house when they were shooting on location intimidated them and let them adjust better to their servant roles.

2.1. Family and Servants in *Downton Abbey*

Throughout the series, the audiences are shown the rigid hierarchy and the relationships found in the Grantham's household. However, as times evolve the rigidity found in the first season gradually evolves to a more relaxed atmosphere. Servants generally spend most of their time downstairs while the family scarcely visits the servants' quarters. The family's relationship with servants is generally formal and distant, though at the same time servants are affectionately treated. Servants are aware of the fact that they do not belong to the same class as the family. As the butler who is at the top of the ladder, transmits this idea through his conservative nature and the way he treats and teaches other servants.

Not only are servants hierarchically organized, but also the family operates according to a rigid pecking order (See Picture 2). Violet Crawley, Dowager Countess of Grantham, represents conservative Victorian values and the epitome of aristocracy. At the beginning of the series, she is utterly appalled due to the intrusion of a middle-class character, Matthew Crawley, in her family. Matthew, a Mancunian lawyer, becomes Lord Grantham's heir presumptive after his lordship's cousin and his cousin's son presumably drowned in the sinking of the *Titanic*. Later on, the shocking union of the youngest daughter, Sybil, and the chauffeur, Tom Branson, disturbs her well-ordained world. Gradually, she learns to accept them, though she still finds it hard to cope with their liberal ideas. The Dowager Countess is a strong-willed aristocrat who is the most reluctant to change. For instance, technological improvements such as electricity or the telephone prove to be challenging for her 19th-century mentality. In spite of her apparent immobility, by the end of the series, she has accepted that times change and outsiders like Branson or Mrs Crawley, Matthew's mother, have become part of the family. Her attitude is generally in consonance with the times.

Following the hierarchical pyramid we find Robert Earl of Grantham and Cora Countess of Grantham. Though they are not as conservative as the Dowager Countess, they still hold certain prejudices against other social classes. Moreover, the attitude they have towards their children is somehow reflected in the way they treat their employees. They adopt a paternalistic pose towards domestic servants. Nevertheless, they display different viewpoints because of their particular upbringings. Lady Grantham was born and raised in the United States, which allows her to understand and support the desire of all classes to work and earn a living. Lord Grantham is more conservative and has more difficulties to adjust to new realities. He was raised to be in control, so when anything escapes his tight grip, he feels discomfort. When it comes to economic matters, he is inclined to protect and save rather than to invest to guarantee future incomes. With Matthew's arrival in the family, Lord Grantham involves him in the management of the estate. However, their points of view on economy differ, therefore leading to a clash between Lord Grantham and Matthew, who is later supported by Tom Branson. After Matthew's decease, his widow and Lord Grantham's eldest daughter, Mary, assumes Matthew's position. By the end of the TV series, Lord Grantham realizes that the allegedly bold investments he made on behalf of the Downton Abbey estate have secured its future as he witnesses his old friends' forfeitures and the decay of a dated system. In the case of Lady Grantham, her origins probably allow her to be more understanding and she accepts changes more easily, especially when they concern the well-being of her daughters. For instance, she supports Sybil in her desire to become a nurse. She also upholds Mary's wishes to become the agent at Downton Abbey and Edith's dream to manage the magazine she inherited from Michael Gregson, her former lover and father of Edith's natural daughter.

The three daughters represent the new generations and the recent emancipation of women. Even though they are not free in the society they live, a significant change can be appreciated from the beginning of the show. It is also important to highlight their positioning towards different social classes. Though Mary is more snobbish than her two sisters, they tend to accept people for their personality and not for their origins. Mary, the eldest, is shown as cold but she actually loves her family and friends and remains loyal to them. She is especially affectionate to her maid, Anna, and her husband, Mr Bates, who is the Earl's valet, unrealistically helping⁹ them in extreme circumstances, for example, when Anna is accused of murder or when Mr Bates is imprisoned. The second daughter, Edith, is a character who experiments a gradual evolution. By end of the series she becomes the successful owner of a magazine dealing with different people without taking into account their social background. Both Mary and Edith are at first reluctant to accept Sybil and Tom's marriage due to Tom's origins and social class; nevertheless, they welcome him into the family when they realize their sister's happiness is more important than any socially imposed boundaries. From then onwards they are more inclined to accept people for their value and not because of their social class. For instance, Edith is willing to marry a simple agent, Herbert Pelham, though he later becomes the 7th Marquess of Hexham after his cousin, the former Marquess, dies. At the end of the sixth season, Mary marries Henry Talbot, a professional car driver, distantly related to the Earl of Shrewsbury. The third sister, Sybil, as mentioned before, marries Tom Branson, the family's chauffeur. The relationship would not have been unusual at that time. However, it might have been hidden from upper-class society and they might not have been married. Moreover, she can be considered the rebel sibling who does not hesitate to show her political inclinations and her support for women's rights, an aspect which would not have

⁹ According to my research, there are no examples of similar behaviours towards servants. Thus, I consider it to be unrealistic. Employers cared, but not that much.

been respectable among the aristocracy. During the Great War she feels the need to participate and help the country. Therefore, she trains as a nurse and helps injured soldiers no matter their class. Sybil also helps a young housemaid, Gwen, to get a job in an office.

The upper-middle class society is represented in the TV series by different characters like Doctor Clark or Mr Murray, Lord Grantham's lawyer. Nevertheless, the most significant representatives of this class would be Matthew Crawley, heir presumptive of Downton Abbey, and his mother, Isobel Crawley. Both are introduced in the series in 1912, during the first season, and Mrs Crawley continues living in the village after her son's death in 1921, at the end of the third season. Matthew introduces changes in the apparently hermetic Grantham's household. During the first season, he holds a job as a solicitor while learning the running of the estate. This shocks the family as they do not understand a gentleman may want to work. The family's attitude is in consonance with the social consensus of the time. After the Great War, his involvement in Downton Abbey's management increases and he starts implementing innovative initiatives to guarantee the estate's pecuniary well-being. Though generally amicable, he clashes with Mr Molesley, his butler and personal valet. Matthew finds no need of his assistance and considers Molesley's position useless. With time and persuasion from Lord Grantham, he understands Molesley's pride in what he is doing and his necessity of a job. Matthew's attitude follows the new lines of thought in society and, gradually, he comes to terms with the realisation that technological household improvements and a change of attitude would mean the disappearance of the 19th-century domestic service system. With regards to Mrs Crawley, she is a trained nurse and a doctors' daughter and wife. Due to her background, she supports Sybil's desire to become a nurse during the Great War and her involvement in women's fight for their rights. She treats servants in a friendly manner and does not have prejudices against the lower classes. However, both she and her son unconsciously

hold some prejudices towards aristocracy. For instance, Matthew seems to be reluctant to enter the Grantham family and believes they will try to change his lifestyle and way of thinking.

Domestic servants are also hierarchically divided (See Picture 3). Senior servants emulate the attitudes they observe upstairs. The butler and the housekeeper, Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes, adopt the role of father and mother mimicking Lord and Lady Grantham. This behaviour would not have been unusual at that time, especially towards young and newly-arrived servants who might have felt homesick. For instance, Mrs Hughes' way to treat Daisy, the scullery maid, and William, the second footman, is an example of this. The butler, Mr Carson, is the head of the domestic staff. He has authority over all other servants. Carson regards the Grantham family as his own as he does not seem to have contact with his biological family. He is a traditionalist who is reluctant to accept change. As time goes by, he is forced to accept household staff modifications and reductions; nevertheless, he still feels nostalgic of old times when Downton Abbey employed large numbers of servants. He also has difficulties accepting Tom Branson's new position at Downton Abbey as Lord and Lady Grantham's son in law. Nonetheless, his manners prevail and he shows no disrespect for him, whereas Stowell, Lord Sinderby's¹⁰ butler in season five, shows little respect for Branson, as well as for other servants. Not everyone would have accepted an Irish socialist chauffeur into the family, but few would have shown it so evidently. In the case of the housekeeper, Mrs Hughes, she is not as passionate for the Granthams. She is more inclined to accept change as part of life and she feels compassionate towards others who are unfortunate. For instance, even though she fires Ethel Parks¹¹ for inappropriate behaviour whilst working, she helps her confront Mr and Mrs Bryant, her son's natural grandparents. Both Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes are strict

¹⁰ Both Stowell and Lord Sinderby are minor characters during season five. Lord Sinderby is Rose Aldrige's father in law. Rose is Robert's maternal cousin once removed.

¹¹ A former housemaid.

with the staff and expect high levels of formality and efficiency when working. At the end of season five, Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes get engaged, eventually marrying in season six. Both characters come from a low-class background but work hard to achieve senior positions. During the fifth season it is revealed that Carson is planning to invest part of his savings in a house for his future retirement. He offers Mrs Hughes to participate; however, Mrs Hughes reveals her lack of savings as she has spent everything on the care of her mentally-sick sister. At the end of their careers, Carson and Mrs Hughes are no longer part of the lower classes but due to their salaries, savings and investments, they are part of the middle class. In 1926, Carson retires at the age of 70 due to health issues and Lord Grantham grants him a pension from the estate.

Two more senior members need to be taken into account, the valet and the lady's maid. Throughout the series, different characters will perform these roles. The main valet, Mr Bates, is a former soldier who fought under Lord Grantham's command in the Boer Wars at the end of the previous century. Bates would have been considered an odd and eccentric choice as he has walks with a pronounced limp due to a war injury. Mr Bates would not have normally had the opportunity to be a valet and, as a physically handicapped former serviceman, he would have found great difficulties to find a decent job. Moreover, Lord Grantham and Mr Bates' relationship would have been quite unusual as servants' personal lives were not usually linked to their employers'. This close relationship positions Mr Bates in advantage in comparison to other servants. Not only is he the valet, a position of trust; he also has a past with his lordship. Apart from this relationship, Bates falls in love with Anna, the head housemaid, later on Mary's lady's maid, and they get married. A relationship between two servants was not unusual at that time; however, lady's maids would not generally get married while being employed. With regards to the position of lady's maid, Miss O'Brien is her ladyship's maid until the

beginning of season four, when she leaves her service. Miss O'Brien uses her position to manipulate her ladyship to her own advantage, as well as to intimidate other servants. She also resents the authority the housekeeper has over her. Her only duty is to exclusively assist her ladyship. However, when Anna is ill during the first season, she is forced by circumstances to assist the three daughters, a situation she profoundly dislikes. Lady Grantham believes to be friends with O'Brien; however, the friendship is not reciprocal, at least during the first season. O'Brien's friendliness responds to her wishes of power as she is perfectly aware of the fact that there is a line between employer and employee which cannot be crossed. Lady Grantham's attitude could be attributed to her American origins whereas O'Brien's attitude is more British. O'Brien seems to be in her late 30s or mid 40s which would have been unusual for a lady's maid, especially at the beginning of the century.

Moreover, another change can be appreciated in the domestic service system. By the end of the series, a 40-year-old pregnant Anna keeps working as a lady's maid. After the baby's birth, she is asked to remain in service. Anna Bates (née Smith), starts at the house as the head housemaid. She also helps the daughters to get ready in the evening. It was quite usual at that time and it would serve as training for Anna in case she wanted to remain in service and find a job as a lady's maid. Anna officially becomes a lady's maid in 1920. Anna's close relationship with Lady Mary surpasses O'Brien's relationship with Lady Grantham. Anna's relationship is more truthful. At the time, close relationships with servants would not have been unlikely; however, both parties tended to establish certain lines.

Gwen Harding (née Dowson), the second housemaid, is employed at Downton Abbey at the beginning of the show. She is very hard-working but she does not intend to remain in service. She takes a correspondence course in typing and handwriting in order to

become a secretary. Gwen establishes a friendship with Lady Sybil, who will encourage and help her achieve her dream. It is Lady Sybil the one who gives her a recommendation; she also lends her clothes for the interviews. Gwen obtains a position as a secretary in the Telephone Company. It is later known that Gwen gets married. In 1925, during season six, Gwen and her husband John Harding visit Downton Abbey as guests of Lord Grantham's sister, Lady Rosamund Painswick. This situation shows how much times have changed from 1912. The strictness of the social class system has softened. After Gwen's departure in 1914, the audiences are shown different housemaids. In 1925, it is clear the Granthams are not going to employ any more stay-in housemaids but instead they hire local girls who come early in the morning and leave before teatime. This attitude would have been very usual at that time as it became extremely expensive and unfashionable to employ a large number of stay-in servants.

The kitchen staff would be composed by many servants, at least in 1912. However, at the end of the series in 1925, new technological devices facilitate the kitchen staff's job. Mrs Patmore is the cook at Downton Abbey and she controls her kitchen quite strictly. During season one, Mrs Patmore has some minor altercations with Mrs Hughes related to the cupboard key. Mrs Patmore inherits a large quantity of money during season five and invests it in a bed and breakfast which will guarantee her well-being in the future. It is assumed, then, that when she retires she will be the middle-class owner of a profitable business. Daisy Mason (née Robinson) is introduced as the scullery maid. However, the show producers decided to compress the role of several maids into one character in order not to confuse the audience. She marries William Mason, a footman who dies during the Great War. She gradually gains importance in the kitchen, eventually becoming under-cook.

Footmen were extremely valued at that time and any number below two would have been odd in a house like Downton Abbey. At all times the audiences are shown at least two footmen. Between 1912 and 1914, Thomas Barrow and William Mason work as first and second footman respectively. Barrow, one of the main characters of the show, aspires to become a valet and later on a butler. In 1925, he works as the under-butler but he is asked to leave as Downton Abbey cannot afford to employ so many people. He eventually returns at the end of the series to substitute Mr Carson after his retirement. Another male servant to take into account is Tom Branson, the chauffeur, who marries Lady Sybil. He is one of the few characters to publicly display his political inclinations. He is a socialist who does not believe in the class system and falls in love with the rebel Sybil. During the show, we are induced to think that other servants are employed but they are not relevant for the story line. The changes in the 1910s and 1920s British society can clearly be appreciated in *DA*; however, certain aspects are exaggerated for the sake of drama. Nevertheless, it is true that maids gradually left service, either to work in shops or to get married. The lack of replacements demonstrates the decay of the system. The difficulties to find footmen shows that youngsters preferred to find more flexible and better-paid jobs in shops or industries.

2.2. Analysis Episode 1

The first episode is essential to understand the Edwardian domestic-service system as the episode presents the house and the people living in it. Five elements will be taken into account for this part of the analysis: (1) duties, (2) hierarchy, (3) relationships servant-servant, (4) relationships family-servants and (5) the class system. This close analysis of the episode allows us to offer an in-depth depiction of the domestic-service system and the situation of servants in society.

To begin with, duties are clearly shown in this first episode, which commences following the lowliest of maids, Daisy, who is expected to be the first one up and to wake up others. As scullery maid she was supposed to take care of the washing and the fires in the kitchen. Lighting the fires in the reception rooms and the family rooms would be the job of a housemaid. Nevertheless, in order not to confuse the audience, the show producers decided not to include more characters. As the camera follows Daisy, we are shown different servants performing their duties, many of whom are never introduced. Throughout the episode, Daisy can be observed serving other servants. For instance in minute 19.04, the kitchen staff and the serving staff are eating separately and Daisy is seen serving. Another aspect related to duties would be when housemaids are shown in minutes 05.12 and 10.36 cleaning the public and private rooms of the house, as the jobs of chamber maids and parlour maids had been fused into one. However, it should be noted that Anna also takes care of the three daughters' evening preparations as observed in minute 29.48. This situation would serve her as training to be a lady's maid.

With regards to the hierarchy, Downton Abbey is clearly divided into three lines of command personified in Mr Carson (butler), Mrs Hughes (housekeeper) and Mrs Patmore (cook). An interesting example is a scene which was never aired where Mrs Hughes asks Thomas to open the windows. Thomas seems to be quite reluctant to follow Mrs Hughes' orders. She reckons he is not directly under her command but considers this duty too menial to bother Carson with it (Fellowes, 2012: 7). Another occasion when Mrs Hughes intervenes is when she questions Mr Bates' efficiency in minute 19.07. Carson rapidly intercedes as he feels that Mrs Hughes' intervention is not convenient because Mr Bates is under his command, not under the housekeeper's. Mrs Hughes is respected and feared by the staff. For instance, Mrs Hughes reaffirms her position at the top of the ladder in minute 15.29 when she reprimands Thomas and Miss O'Brien for not doing their job.

With regards to Mrs Patmore, she is in charge of the kitchen staff. For instance, in minute 02.10 Daisy is doing her job when Mrs Patmore asks her about her other tasks and orders her to continue. The cook has to make sure everything works as expected in her kitchen. Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that in a house like Downton Abbey it might not have been the cook the one controlling the scullery maid, but it would probably have been the under-cook or a kitchen maid.

Moreover, other examples of the strict hierarchical system can be found. In minute 42.10 all servants file out in front of Downton Abbey as the family awaits the arrival of the Duke of Crowborough. The servants are in order of hierarchy in theory. However, only four maids, two footmen, the valet, the lady's maid, the housekeeper and the butler are present. Due to the size of the household more servants would have been expected. Another demonstration of hierarchy can be found in minute 06.32 when Anna asks Miss O'Brien to help her carry the tea trays to the daughters. O'Brien says "I've got her ladyship's to carry" (Fellowes, 2012: 9). Here, she clearly states her privileged position as the Lady's maid and refuses to serve the daughters of the house since it is not one of her obligations.

Friendship relations between servants would not have been uncommon as they had to work together from dawn to dusk. Rivalries and schemes would also be in their agendas. The kitchen staff and the serving staff would often compete with each other. For instance, in minute 06.28, when Mrs Patmore asks Anna if the tea trays are ready and Anna responds "if the water is boiled" (Fellowes, 2012: 9) she indirectly questions the kitchen staff's efficiency. Furthermore, close friendships are formed in the household, like Mrs Hughes and Mr Carson's friendly relation and Miss O'Brien and Thomas' scheming relation. The first one is shown for the first time in minute 25.51 and the second one in minute 15.22.

Though there are strict class lines that servants know that cannot be crossed, three important relationships between the family and servants appear during the first episode. Firstly, Lady Grantham thinks O'Brien is her friend, when in fact she uses her influence over Cora to guide her to believe what she wants. Cora is easily influenced and O'Brien takes advantage of it. An example of this can be found in minute 27.26 when O'Brien manipulates her ladyship to favour her friend, Thomas. Secondly, Mr Bates and Lord Grantham's friendship, which would have been quite unusual, was forged under the extreme circumstances of war. In minute 19.20, we are first shown this closeness. The other servants are surprised not only about the relationship but also about the lord's intrusion into the servants' quarters, which the family scarcely visited. Thirdly, Barrow is the Duke of Crowborough's lover. Romantic relationships between a servant and an upper-class member would not have been uncommon according to my findings (Musson; 209: 181-183). Crowborough and Thomas relationship is relatively surprising as a homosexual man at that time would have been imprisoned if his preferences were made public. I have not found examples of homosexual relationships; nevertheless, since homosexuality was illegal it is unlikely any relationships were made public. Though the lines separating the family and the staff were very rigid, many secret relationships took place.

The servants and the family believed their social positions were different as society promoted the feeling of belonging. Nevertheless, some long-time servants might have felt to be part of the family. This is the case of Mr Carson in minute 25.51 when Mr Carson and Mrs Hughes are having a conversation. Mr Carson is clearly devoted to the family he serves and does not conceive a world without them in power. On the other hand, though Mrs Hughes seems affectionate to Robert and Cora, she does not think about them as her own family. She knows they live in a different world from hers.

Last but not least, differentiation between the social classes can be found in the first episode of *DA*. For instance, Lord Grantham is extremely surprised in minute 21.39 when he discovers that his heir is a lawyer, an upper-middle class member of society, quite distant in rank from him and his family. However, at that time it was not strange for minor nobility sons to find a profession. Law, medicine, and the clergy were then considered respectable careers. Murray, his lordship's lawyer, feels offended by his prejudice as he is in fact a lawyer and works to earn a living. Mathew Crawley and his mother, Isobel Crawley, live in Manchester and at the end of the episode can be observed in their large, suburban villa. In minute 01.04.50, they are eating their breakfast when a maid, Ellen, enters with the post. In this scene it can be appreciated that the Crawleys belong to the upper-middle class. They most likely have a small staff. Ellen might be their housekeeper because of her age. The familiarity used to refer to the servant shows the new middle-class mentality.

As I have mentioned before, the working classes were not homogenous. Servants belonged to this class as well as others such as factory workers or miners. The situation for a housekeeper and a factory worker or a shop assistant would have been completely different. In minute 26.16, Mrs Hughes, a single woman who has never had a child, wonders what would have happened if Mr Carson and she had worked in different places. Butlers were not forbidden to have a family and they could perfectly maintain one. Nevertheless, housekeepers were not generally married. Mrs Hughes reflects the idea the domestic service was gradually less attractive for women who wanted to work and have a family. Shops and offices were seen as a good opportunity to earn some money before getting married. Moreover, these types of jobs gave them more free time to socialise.

It is also interesting to see that servants could come from different kinds of backgrounds. For instance, in minute 48.38, Mrs Hughes and William are talking while

William prepares the family's suitcases. Mrs Hughes cares about William and wants to find out how he is adapting in the house. She tells him that it is usual to feel homesick and according to her "[i]t means you come from a happy home. There's plenty of people here who'd envy that" (Fellowes, 2012: 57). Mrs Hughes' opinion induces us to think that many servants not only got the job to escape from the miseries of the industrial workers but also to escape from unhappy situations. In many cases, alcoholism and abusive parents would encourage them to leave as soon as possible. It is also important to analyse Mr Bates and his position in society. In minute 13.25, Mr Bates is shown his new bedroom and he is more than happy to be there. As a handicapped former serviceman, he would have struggled to find a decent job. The room, though quite modest, is more than he would have been able to expect if he had worked in a different job. All in all, this in-depth analysis has allowed me to exemplify how the series provides a realistic portrayal of domestic service and its nuances and complexities in the Edwardian period.

3. Conclusion

The golden age of the domestic service system came to an abrupt end at the dawn of the Great War. During the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries, members of the domestic service, who were part of the lower classes, did not fit in the industrial community. Industrial workers did not consider servants to be part of their collective whilst envying their living conditions. Servants' working conditions were equally arduous though less dangerous. During the 19th century, especially during the second half, the government intervened and social improvements were implemented in industry. By the beginning of the 20th century, many battles had been won and working in factories was not as dangerous as it used to be during the previous century. A wider employment offer in shops and offices also attracted youngsters towards better-paid jobs rather than the enslaving domestic service world. Living conditions in urban areas improved as slum areas were eliminated and new urban development plans were approved. Legislation affecting domestic servants was passed at the beginning of the 20th century. A gradual increase in wages, together with the 1911 National Insurance tax, led many households to reduce the number of staff. During the 19th century, most domestic workers were employed by middle-class or upper-middle-class families. At the beginning of the following century, these families could no longer afford the same number of servants. Moreover, the new technological advances such as telephones, cars or electrical appliances reduced servants' workload; therefore, large numbers of servants were no longer needed.

During the Edwardian era, domestic service followed the style of the previous century. Servants worked long working days and were guaranteed a wage, bed and food. There was a strict hierarchical order which had to be followed. Even though there was a majority of female domestic servants, it was a masculine world in which the butler was the

ruler. Male domestic servants were more expensive. Consequently, having male staff denoted a higher social status and economic power. Three senior servants were supposed to supervise the staff: (1) the butler was in charge of any other male servants, such as footmen. (2) Housekeepers oversaw housemaids and maids-of-all-work. In middle and upper-middle class households, it was unusual to hire a butler so housekeepers were in charge. (3) Cooks were in charge of the kitchen and any maids working there. Depending on the wealth of the family, they might have afforded two cooks, one for daily meals and the other for special occasions. In case there were any children in the family, a governess would be hired to educate them as well as a nanny to take care of them. Governesses were expected to come from an upper-middle class background at least. The other servants would generally come from poor backgrounds; however, by the end of their careers, many senior servants could aspire to a middle-class lifestyle. Some servants remained in service all their lives; others, especially female young servants like housemaids, only worked to earn some money before marrying and having children.

DA offers a realistic portrayal of a family living during the Edwardian era in a country house. Servants are an essential part of the house but never part of the family. Family and servants coexist but have separate spaces. Servants' quarters are scarcely visited by the family and servants respect the family's privacy. *Downton Abbey* is a highly hierarchical world. In fact, a feeling of belonging was promoted so that servants would feel they had to be faithful, and subservient, to their masters. In *Downton Abbey* servants know their place and they do not expect it to change. However, from the first season onwards, *Downton Abbey* will be affected by social circumstances and the family gradually employs less servants. Not only was it economically difficult to support many servants, but also not fashionable. The increasingly powerful middle-class society promoted the custom of hiring fewer stay-in servants. It is important to take into account

that, at the beginning of the series, especially in the first episode, many servants are seen but not introduced. It would have been expected that a house the size of Downton Abbey employed large numbers of servants before the Great War. At the end of the show, in 1926, fewer servants remain in the household. Some elements of the show are unrealistically altered to fit the plot better. For instance, producers encompassed several maids' jobs into one. This would be the case of Daisy. Moreover, hiring a handicapped valet would have been quite eccentric even taking into account the allegedly close relationship between Lord Grantham and Mr Bates. Even though servants and families were constantly in contact, they might not have had such close relationships.

Conclusively, *DA* can be argued to be a show that provides an overall faithful portrayal of Edwardian society and the domestic-service system. Nevertheless, it is a system that has mostly disappeared so we have to rely on memoirs such as the ones I have used (*The Gentlewoman's Companion: or, A Guide to the Female Sex; Lost Voices of the Edwardians*) or historians' accounts (Musson; Maloney) to be able to imagine what a country-house estate was like. *DA*, in any case, allows us to penetrate this world. Though it is completely fictitious, its creators based their portrayal of the Downton Abbey country house on careful research. The show also realistically reveals that domestic servants' lives greatly evolved as society changed. People were no longer inclined to follow a career in domestic service. They preferred to find a job in shops and offices. The show effectively depicts the decay of an era. My research in this dissertation, however, is limited to what the show depicts and, as a consequence, it focuses on servants working for upper-class and aristocratic families. Further research could be conducted to assess the effects of the decay of the domestic-service system in middle-class households, as most servants worked there after the Great War.

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Annex 1

Tables

Table 1 - Maloney, Alison. *Life Below Stairs*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013. Print. (Page 47)

<u>1893 Beer Allowance for Staff at Meals Only</u>	Pints
Butler	3
Coachman	3
Groom	3
Cook	2
Lady's Maid	2
First Housemaid	2
Second Housemaid	2
Laundry Maid	1
Kitchen Maid	2
Extra man	2
Total allowance	22

1893 June 17: At present three servants do not take beer

Table 2 - Maloney, Alison. *Life Below Stairs*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013. Print. (Page 43)

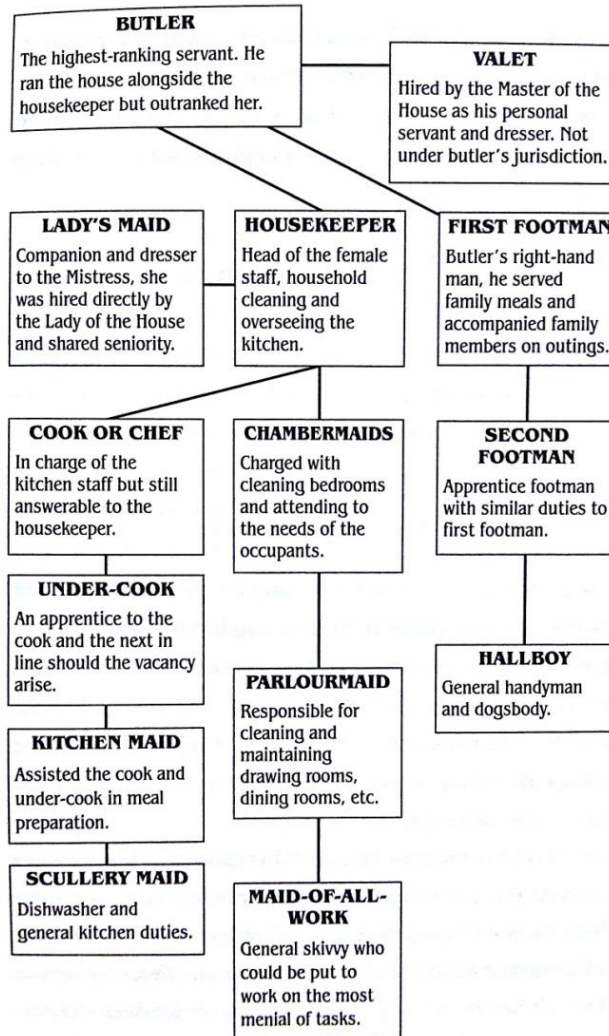
<u>Yearly Wages in 1901</u>	
Butler	60£
Housekeeper	45£
Cook	40£
Lady's maid	32£
Kitchen maid	24£
First footman	26£
Second footman	24£
First housemaid	28£
Scullery maid	12£
Coachman	18£
Hallboy	16£

Table 3 - Fellowes, Julian. *Downton Abbey. The Complete Scripts - Season 1*. New York: William Morrow, 2012. Print. (Page 397)

<u>Cast List (Season 1)</u>	
Robert Bathurst	Sir Anthony Strallan
Samantha Bond	Lady Rosamund Painswick
Hugh Bonneville	Robert, Earl of Grantham
Jessica Brown Findlay	Lady Sybil Crawley
Laura Carmichael	Lady Edith Crawley
Jim Carter	Mr Carson
Charlie Cox	Duke of Crowborough
Jonathan Coy	George Murray
Brendan Coyle	Mr Bates
Michelle Dockery	Lady Mary Crawley
Kevin Doyle	Mr Molesley
Bill Fellowes	Joe Burns
Siobhan Finneran	Miss O'Brien
Joanne Froggatt	Anna
Bernard Gallagher	Bill Molesley
Nicky Henson	Charles Grigg
Thomas Howes	William
Theo James	Kemal Pamuk
Rob James-Collier	Thomas
Allen Leech	Branson
Rose Leslie	Gwen
CristineLohr	Mrs Bird
Phyllis Logan	Mrs Hughes
Elizabeth McGovern	Cora, Countess of Grantham
Sean McKenzie	Mr Bromidge
Sophie McShera	Daisy
Lesley Nicol	Mrs Patmore
Fergus O'Donnell	Mr Drake
Brendan Patricks	Evelyn Napier
David Robb	Dr Clarkson
Cathy Sara	Mrs Drake
Maggie Smith	Violet, Dowager Countess of Grantham
Dan Stevens	Matthew Crawley
Jane Wenham	Mrs Bates
Penelope Wilton	Isobel Crawley

Pictures

Picture 1 - Maloney, Alison. *Life Below Stairs*. New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2013. Print. (Page 21)



Picture 2 - Fellowes, Jessica. *The World of Downton Abbey*. London: Collins, 2011. Print. (Page 13)



Picture 3- Fellowes, Jessica. *The World of Downton Abbey*. London: Collins, 2011. Print.
(Page 12)

