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The Representation of the Anglo-American Cultural Conflict under George VI: *Downton Abbey* and *Hyde Park on Hudson*

Abstract. The paper focuses on two cinematic productions set in the 1920s and 1930s: an episode of the British TV series *Downton Abbey* and the British comedy-drama *Hyde Park on Hudson*. Both works focus on a juxtaposition of the British and the Americans, playing with similar stereotypes which gained popularity a century earlier. The paper analyzes both productions, comparing them to the discourse of nineteenth-century travel writing about the USA, which, arguably, is a genre best depicting Anglo-American preconceptions of the time. Despite using elements of the same language both films seem to favor different sides of the Transatlantic conflict. The paper argues, however, that while *Hyde Park* presents Americans as the victors in the cultural rivalry, *Downton's* message is less unequivocal.

Keywords: Anglo-American cultural conflict; heritage film; Transatlantic stereotypes

Downton Abbey and *Hyde Park on Hudson* are two British film productions from the 2010s set in the 1920s and 1930s, respectively. The main theme of episode nine of the fourth season of *Downton* and *Hyde Park* is a juxtaposition of British and American national traits by playing with stereotypes dating back to the early nineteenth century. The scriptwriters of both films describe the early twentieth-century reality through conventions that gained popularity a century earlier, disseminated particularly through the genre of travel writing. However, while most of these British depictions of the young republic are negative, neither of the films, despite using the same imagery, unequivocally takes sides: both present likeable characters from the two camps. Yet, as

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shall be seen, on a subtler level both works convey very specific messages when it comes to possible victory in the transatlantic cultural conflict.

What differentiates both productions is certainly their impact, measured both by viewer response and scholarly interest. *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012) did not meet with particularly enthusiastic reviews and was not very successful financially (Higson 2016, 347); this may be one of the reasons why critical analyses of the film are almost non-existent. On the other hand, since the airing of its first season in 2010, *Downton Abbey* has attracted scholarly attention focusing largely on the reasons of its enormous popularity. It has been studied as an example of the heritage film by, *inter alia*, Katherine Byrne in "Adapting heritage" (2014) and "New Developments in Heritage" (2015), Christa Rydeberg Aakær in "Idealized Nationalism in *Downton Abbey*" (2018), and Rosalia Baena and Christa Byker in "Dialects of Nostalgia" (2014). The two latter articles also deal with the question of identity, analyzing the construction of Englishness that the series promotes as a response to specific challenges posed by the early twenty-first century to British society. *Downton*'s popularity makes it worthy of such deep reflection, as the series seems to have reverberated with a very specific need of British audiences. The sources of this acclaim are elaborated on in Baena and Byker's articles, as well as in Jane Mattisson's "Downton Abbey: a Cultural Phenomenon" (2014). This paper, though it is not directly concerned with the question of why the series has become such an important element of British culture, builds on the work of the mentioned critics in its interest in *Downton*'s social ideology, focusing on its very specific example: the juxtaposition of Britons and Americans. Comparing *Downton* with *Hyde Park*, despite the latter's smaller cultural impact, allows one to see two visions of Anglo-American cultural relations in the early twentieth century, both of which resort to and modify stereotypes inherited from the nineteenth century.

A stereotype is defined by Oxford Reference as "a preconceived and oversimplified idea of the characteristics which typify a person, race, or community which may lead to treating them in a particular way." Such preconceived ideas held of America by the British in the nineteenth century may be best observed in travel writing: a genre very popular at the time and lending itself particularly well to mental shortcuts and satire masquerading as objective description. As Langbauer points out, British travelers visited the U.S. with the expectation that the republic "was almost British, had once been British, should still have been British; it should give them (they thought) their own image magnified back" (Langbauer 2008, 6). Indeed, one of the chief sources of frustration for the travelers was differences where they wanted to find similarities, be it in natural landscapes (see e.g. Mulvey 2009, 19, 178), cities (Mulvey 2009, 149, 152–54), or manners, which made Americans seem to them loud, impolite, and unsophisticated. The most common complaints – most of which, as shall be seen, characterize the Americans portrayed in the two analyzed works – included those about the unreliability of domestic servants, American obsession with money to the detriment of interest in arts (Mesick 1922, 66), the lack of social distinctions (Dunlop 1998, 49–50), or, quite the contrary, Americans' latent longing for aristocratic titles (Berger 1943, 58–60).

As the two films in question show, the Anglo-American cultural conflict has survived in popular culture until the present day. The first interesting example of its evocation is episode nine of the fourth season of *Downton Abbey* (2013). The hugely successful and critically acclaimed British series has been created by Julian Fellowes: English aristocrat, writer, actor and conservative politician. It takes place in the first half of the twentieth century and revolves around the Crawley family, who are the owners and guardians of the eponymous estate. In the first season the viewer finds out that the house's owner, Robert Crawley, the Earl of Grantham (played by the stately yet approachable Hugh Bonneville), had married an American, Cora (Elizabeth McGovern) out of pragmatic reasons that with time were completed by love and devotion: like many British estates at the turn of the twentieth century, Downton needed American money to survive.

The fourth season takes place in 1923, when a young cousin, Rose (Lily James), is about to be presented at court. This becomes an occasion for a visit in London of the American part of the family: Cora's mother, Martha Levinson (played by Shirley MacLaine, appropriately known for her roles of strong and independent women), and brother Harold (Paul Giamatti). This visit provides to the scriptwriters an opportunity to contrast the English and the American parts of the family, playing with the familiar nineteenth-century stereotypes. As a matter of fact, the very first words uttered by Mrs. Levinson concern a maid who turned in her notice unexpectedly as they were leaving, which means that Cora's maid will have to serve both women. Mrs. Levinson's ignorance of her maid's motifs of as well as her complete lack of surprise at the fact of her sudden resignation mirror common complaints of British travelers about the unreliability of American servants (see Berger 1943, 57–58). Since service connotes inferiority, the travelers maintained that young American women were "taught to believe that the most abject poverty is preferable to domestic service" (Trollope 2006, 52), and, as a result, left as soon as they have set aside enough money without prior notice. Charles Augustus Murray, who visited America in the 1830s, had similar impressions: he called American servants "the most capricious of tyrants" (1839, I.208). Another traveler from the first half of the century, Basil Hall, was harsher: he spoke of the "ungracious, capricious, sluggish, disrespectful, and, at the very best, ill qualified nature of American attendance" (1829, I.300). Thus, the complaint about the maid may be seen as a perfect introduction of the American theme in the episode.

The best example of Anglo-American national stereotypes is the character of Harold Levinson's valet, Ethan (Michael Benz). He is the epitome of many traits that already nineteenth-century Britons found exotic at best, and annoying at worst, both in his beliefs and manners. He is depicted as kind and enthusiastic, but not very smart. Ethan looks puzzled and fascinated by the British way of doing things, but is also unable to adapt to them, which makes him commit blunder after blunder: he wants to shake hands with the head housekeeper, Mrs. Hughes (Phyllis Logan), and fraternizes with his employees, referring to Mrs. Levinson as "old mother Levinson," to the British staff's dismay (one may think here of the traveler Frances Trollope complaining

about her American neighbors' habit of referring to her as "the English old woman" (Trollope 2006, 86)). The most awkward moment comes when Ethan is asked to play the role of a footman and serve hors d'oeuvres to guests at a party and, instead of holding the tray for those willing to help themselves, he starts to convince the passing guests to try them, praising their deliciousness. Mr. Carson, the butler of Downton Abbey (played by the dignified Jim Carter), is outraged by Ethan's behavior, saying: "Keep your opinions about the catering to yourself," and adding: "You are a footman, not a travelling salesman!" The look on Ethan's face suggests that he does not entirely understand how improper his behavior is – something that the viewer, by the end of the fourth season, used to the English staff's conduct, realizes very well.

The scene of Carson asking Ethan to play the footman for the party is interesting too: the Downton butler explains that it is customary for valets to act as footmen during important events, but he seems to expect opposition: in other episodes of the series, whenever Downton valets Barrow and Molesley are asked to perform duties below their usual position, they experience it as degradation and personal offence. Ethan, however, does not mind, and there are two possibilities as to why: he is either ignorant of the nuances of servants' hierarchies and unable to feel such a subtle offence, or he does not care, as for him being a valet is a job and not a yardstick of his worth as a person. That the latter may be true could be testified to by Ethan's surprise when the Downton staff call him "Mr. Levinson" and do not care what his own last name is. One might explain the custom of calling servants in the U.K. by their employer's name as a matter of convenience, a sign of belonging to the family, or an erasure of the servant's own identity, which, for the American, is strange as he still thinks of himself as of an independent person, with a business-like connection to his employer – a fact highlighted already by nineteenth-century travelers (e.g. Martineau 1837, II.171; Grattan 1859, I.258).

Ethan's independence is also visible in the fact that as soon as he discovers the skills of the Granthams' cook, Daisy (Sophie McShera), he encourages her to "go it alone" – this provokes only her irritation, since, for her, it is unacceptable that he should try to change her life despite not knowing her. After hearing of a former Downton footman, Alfred, having become the underchef at the Ritz, Ethan exclaims: "quite the American dream!," which, given that the whole situation has nothing to do with the U.S., looks like a caricature of American jingoism.

While the portrayal of Ethan is a rather flat caricature of the most stereotypical understanding of the Anglo-American cultural conflict, the character of his employer, Harold Levinson, is more nuanced. At first, he is presented as an equally one-dimensional and far less likeable specimen of the American: money-driven and ill-mannered. As rumor spreads among the Crawleys' aristocratic friends that the Levinsons are rich, Lord Aysgarth (James Fox) thinks of copying Lord Grantham's arrangement and saving his impoverished family through marrying Mrs. Levinson or marrying off his daughter, Madeleine (Poppy Drayton), to Harold Levinson. Harold not only immediately reads Lord Aysgarth's intentions but also does not shy away from discussing them, to Madeleine's embarrassment: at the suggestion of dancing with the young lady,

he contemptuously declares that he is used to fathers wanting him to dance with their daughters, thus almost openly calling Lord Aysgarth and his daughter fortune hunters.

Harold does not hide his arrogance and feeling of superiority, expressing regret at having left America. He explains that he arrived prepared for "cold baths, warm drinks and, most of all, the food," believing the U.K. to be a backward and uncivilized country, yet all he proves through his rudeness is that he does not know how to behave. Furthermore, he is not only arrogant but also snobbish and hypocritical: while he apparently disdains British social hierarchy, at Rose's presentation he is very eager to meet the king, and when he discovers it to be impossible, he unsuccessfully tries to introduce himself to the Prince of Wales. Here, Harold represents a vice that many British travelers accused Americans of a century earlier: a concealed love of aristocracy (Berger 1943, 60). One may recall Frederick Marryat, who spoke of Americans paying greater respect to titles than the English (1839, 134), exhibiting a tendency to be "excessively aristocratical and exclusive … in spite of their institutions" (1840, 146).

Rude as he is, Harold is right in one thing: money is his defining attribute not only in his own eyes but also in those of some British aristocrats. As mentioned earlier, Lord Aysgarth becomes interested in Mrs. Levinson only because of her wealth. She, too, realizes the sources of his interest, but rather than feeling offended she enjoys the attention he gives her, leading him on. Yet, she ultimately rejects his proposal, not finding the transaction appealing. For Mrs. Levinson the prospect of becoming a lady is not that tempting since, being a "modern," she does not care about titles. At this occasion, she voices the Anglo-American prejudices very clearly: she states that she does not want to live among people who consider her "loud, opinionated, and common," and whom she finds "narrow, and pompous, and boring." Thus, her comment implies that all the preconceptions which the two nations have of each other are negative.

Harold's approach to being seen through the lens of his fortune is less light-hearted than his mother's. Soon it becomes clear that his arrogance is a mask of low self-esteem and he needs lady Madeleine, who befriends him in the course of the episode, to convince him that money is not the only thing he can offer a woman. Ultimately, one of the main themes of the episode turns out to be Harold's conversion: from a self-assured and rude outsider to a kind friend to Madeleine, trying to make up for his bad behavior, but also from a prejudiced Anglophobe to an admirer of things British, admitting that London has changed him. Lady Madeleine is to him no longer an impoverished fortune hunter but a person with whom he wants to keep in touch; British food turns out to be so tasty that he decides to bring an English cook with him to America, and, though he evidently cannot waltz, English balls turn out to be quite enjoyable.

If one were to judge by the development of Harold's character, one could conclude that the message of the episode is simple: the savage American has come to England full of anti-British stereotypes, and emerged civilized, with newly found appreciation for the truly superior culture. What complicates this image slightly, however, is the conflict between the two grandmothers of the series: Lady Violet (Maggie Smith) and Mrs. Levinson. Whenever the two women meet, the clash is a source of comedy

enhanced by chauvinism: they keep attributing each other's quirks to the nations they belong to. In the episode in question, their bickering has a surprisingly serious undertone: after Lady Violet makes fun of Lord Aysgarth's wooing Mrs. Levinson, the latter explains that she does not care for titles because she is not afraid of the future, adding: "My world is coming nearer, and your world? It's slipping further and further away." The look on the countess's face testifies to the fact that there is no riposte to be made, as her rival is right. Looking at the interaction between the Americans and the British throughout the episode one can see that the British may still have the better manners, but it is an advantage that becomes less and less significant in the changing world of the twentieth century.

The conversation between the two grandmothers makes one wonder about the worldview dominating *Downton.* The series has often been accused of strong conservatism, typical for the heritage film of the 1980s, which expressed "a very conservative view of a rather coherent world in which everyone knew their place" (Baena and Byker 2014, 9). Byrne sees *Downton* as "post-post-heritage": "deliberately, and shamelessly, harking back to the heyday of 1980s and 1990s 'classic' heritage" to provide a rather easy and comforting experience (2014, 325–26) through a "problematically idealized representation of social history" (2015, 177). At the same time, though, she agrees that the series is "a contradictory text in many ways" (2014, 324), since, while it certainly idealizes the past, it, for example, gives voice also to the frustrations of the servants (mostly Thomas and Cora's maid Miss O'Brien). One may add here that Lord Grantham's conservatism is challenged throughout the series in a variety of ways: he has to learn to accept one of his daughter's marriage to a socialist chauffeur, and another's love child with a married man, as well as his son-in-law Tom, daughter Mary, and her husband Matthew's new plan of managing the estate, which clearly shows that the old ways are inefficient and obsolete.[1] The episode discussed here inscribes itself into the same picture: while the old world Downton stands for is depicted as ultimately charming even to the Anglophobe Harold, it is not so to his mother, who is not only immune to the appeal of titles and manners, but shrewdly sees that the future belongs to her countrymen.

Mrs. Levinson is, of course, right: the power balance is shifting towards America both politically and culturally. This shift is reflected by the second work discussed here: the British film *Hyde Park on Hudson* (2012) – whose Britishness, however, requires qualification, as while it was filmed in the U.K. and directed by the British director Roger Michell, the script was written by the American playwright Richard Nelson. Contrary to *Downton Abbey*, *Hyde Park* dramatizes real historical events: King George VI and Queen Elizabeth's 1939 visit to the United States. On the eve of World War II, King George became the first reigning British monarch to visit the U.S., spending three days in Washington, New York, and president Roosevelt's private

[1] In her article "New Developments in Heritage," Katherine Byrne admits that in season three *Downton* takes a darker turn, which includes "Robert … ceas[ing] to be the moral compass and authoritative heart" of the series (2015, 180).

estate in Hyde Park, NY. The film shows the events from the perspective of Roosevelt's distant cousin, Margaret "Daisy" Suckley (Laura Linney), who is asked by the president's mother (Elizabeth Wilson) to keep him company, which soon ends in an affair (in this respect, the screenplay has been inspired by Suckley's diaries and letters discovered posthumously). The royal visit in Hyde Park is depicted against the backdrop of Roosevelt's extramarital affairs and unorthodox family life, throwing the British monarchs in the midst of it.

Once again, the film offers an opportunity to juxtapose Americans and the British of the early twentieth century; this time, however, it is the Britons who travel overseas and are confronted with foreign customs. Still, this does not necessarily result in a contrasting portrayal: the Americans of *Hyde Park* share some characteristics of those in *Downton*. American snobbery and secret fascination with aristocracy is here personified by the president's mother Sara Delano, who makes every effort to impress the royal couple, including borrowing earthenware from a Mrs. Astor and a toilet seat from a shop. As she returns the toilet seat after the royal visit, the shop owner decides to use it for publicity, putting it in the shop window with a sign saying, "The King and Queen of England sat here." This shows that, though Americans make fun of monarchy and treat it not quite seriously, they are, at the same time, captivated by its romance. It is a humorous reworking of the trope present in British travelogues, whose authors commonly believed that Americans "ridiculed aristocratic titles … merely to cover up their true desires," which were embodied by a "love of titles … greater than that of any Englishman" (Berger 1943, 60). If such love of aristocracy was, indeed, ever true, it certainly was not a real issue in the 1930s; however, the film suggests the continual existence of a certain soft spot for British high society among Americans.

Though American servants in *Hyde Park* are not shown as unreliable, they are not the best qualified: first the borrowed plates smash falling from a side table on their own, and then a servant trips and drops the content of her tray (both events happened in reality). The president (whose eccentric character is highlighted by the casting of Bill Murray in this role) is not particularly graceful either: the rudest of his decisions is to accommodate the King (Samuel West) and Queen (Olivia Coleman) in a room decorated with prints of cartoons from the American press caricaturizing British soldiers in the War of 1812. The King pretends to be amused by them, but privately the couple is terrified, wondering what their hosts are trying to communicate. It is difficult to guess Roosevelt's intentions from the film: the option that he is trying to offend them deliberately seems rather unlikely; so does one that the allusion to the Anglo-American war is purposefully confrontational, putting the King in a weak negotiating position. Rather, given the president's representation as an open and good-natured man, it seems that he truly believes the caricatures to be funny, which does not do him much credit. Like in *Downton*, and in accordance with the century-old stereotypes, Roosevelt may have the money but not the manners.

Given that the action of the film takes place in the U.S., in comparison to *Downton,* the producers have had a greater opportunity to focus on the American egalitarian

spirit. The president's mother from the start warns Mrs. Roosevelt not to address the Queen as "Elizabeth," which evokes Eleanor's annoyed comments: "Please, what century is this?"; "Why do we care what a queen or a king says about us?" Despite Mrs. Delano's efforts, calling the Queen "Elizabeth" is precisely what Eleanor proposes right after the guests appear. In another scene, she declares: "These kings and queens or whatever are no better than ourselves, they're just people." And it is not only Mrs. Roosevelt that feels the need to stress her equality to the royal couple: even the drivers at Hyde Park announce to Daisy that the King "still has to put his pants one leg at a time" and laugh at the prospect of her curtsying. Being American, it seems, means a constant need to reaffirm that the King is but a man and no better than oneself. This aspect of *Hyde Park* may be seen as a subtler version of the traveler Thomas Colley Grattan's depiction of Americans who imagined themselves to be the equals of European upper classes. Grattan illustrated this – to his mind – absurd belief by quoting a shopkeeper who allegedly had told him about his travel to Europe during which he had expected to "have a talk with Victoria and Lewis Phillips" (1859, II.84).

There may be no better way to deny someone's superiority than by expressing superiority to them. One factor that allows the American characters in *Hyde Park* to feel they have the upper hand is the apparent reason of the royal visit, which is that of money. In reality, interpretations of the historical visit's purpose range from it being simply "strengthen[ing] relations between the two countries" to "obtain[ing] assurances of American support should the deepening international crisis in Europe eventually lead to war" (Johnson 2021, 332). However, historians believe that the British government did not count on much regarding its potential outcome (Johnson 2021, 333). In Whitehall's opinion, the visit "was intended as a public relations exercise between friends that could, if necessary, be used as a platform for more concrete requests for assistance if circumstances dictated in the future" (Johnson 2021, 337).

In the film, however, everyone is clear about the real purpose of the visit: Eleanor believes that "they are coming here with their hand out" – even though the real Eleanor Roosevelt, at least publically, wrote about the visit in a significantly more dignified tone, presenting it as her husband's initiative to "create a bond of friendship between the people of the two countries," given that in the upcoming war Great Britain would be America's "first line of defense" (Roosevelt 1949, 184). In the film, Eleanor sees the royal couple as seeking only their own country's benefit. Roosevelt, too, admits that "without some help from us, there soon might not be an England to be king of," and while he does not criticize the royal couple openly for coming to plead for money, he makes a rather inappropriate joke about selling tickets to the dinner with the King and Queen, which could have paid for their trip, making Queen Elizabeth rather embarrassed. In *Hyde Park,* the whole America is put into the same position as Harold in *Downton Abbey*: it is being courted by English nobility, unable to keep up their privileged position without its financial resources. Like Lord Aysgarth, the King and Queen are portrayed as placed in a rather degrading position, dependent upon the good will of their hosts.

The president's blunt joke is quite representative of how he is portrayed in the film in general: direct, strong-willed, and not idealized. The way in which his relationship with the King is depicted reflects the power balance between the two countries. Their private conversation starts with the president asking King George to push his wheelchair and close the door behind them – a directness that soon melts into paternalism. Roosevelt understands the monarch's insecurities and frustrations better than anybody else, given the apparent similarity of their positions. Furthermore, his suffering from polio allows him to sympathize with George's speech impediment; being older and more experienced, Roosevelt enters the role of a father figure, giving the King advice on how to be a good ruler, and praising his performance ("You were wonderful tonight, young man!" "You're going to be a very fine king"). This portrayal adds to the overall impression of Roosevelt's strength contrasted with the King's weakness: the president receives the British monarch to hear out his pleas for support, feels himself indispensable for assuring Britain's future, and sees George as a beginner who does not yet know how to be a king (though, at that point, he had been one for three years) but with a little encouragement can grow into the role just fine.

The King greatly appreciates Roosevelt's fatherly tone, since from the start of the film he is depicted as insecure and lost in the role which he never wanted to perform. He is stressed by the responsibility connected to the visit's outcome, and so is his wife. The royal couple are portrayed as so strained that they keep drinking and fighting in private, and the Queen keeps comparing her husband to his brother, to the latter's advantage. When she learns that they are going to be served hotdogs at the picnic the following day, she is outraged, wondering whether the hosts are trying to make fun of them. She compares the idea to serving the British Prime Minister "bangers and mash," which would not be an innocent menu item but would imply how the guest is thought of, to which the King says that they need to be more confident.

The Queen's reactions, however, seem to be dictated less by the lack of self-confidence and more by her awareness of the significance of political gestures, or, perhaps, by her greater "Britishness." A clear sign of how "British" she is is the fact that, as the King tells her that she simply does not like Americans, she replies: "I don't like a lot of Americans. I like some" – which, in fact, is a confirmation of her bias. Her Anglocentric attitude is visible in her surprise at the president's estate being located in Hyde Park, while everyone knows that "Hyde Park is in London!" When she enters one of the wallpapered rooms in the estate, she tells Mrs. Roosevelt that it is "charming," but her expression openly conveys distaste. How important the British sense of superiority is may be seen in the British ambassador's warning letter that the house at Hyde Park is "dismal, extremely badly run, and most uncomfortable" – which is, in fact, a direct quote from Lady Reading, wife of the former British ambassador (Johnson 2021, 340).

In the film, King George seems to share his wife's impressions, but only to a degree. When it comes to his character, the focus is rather on how ridiculous and lost he appears: when the royal couple stop in a field before reaching Hyde Park, he wishes to meet "an American" and is surprised that a farmer passes by them uninterested, the

King's hand frozen in a royal wave in the middle of nowhere. This image suggests his inflated sense of self-worth connected to his position, but also his being out of touch with reality. During his private conversation with Roosevelt, when the time comes to talk about politics, he pulls out a piece of paper from his pocket and tries to read to the president a note about the upcoming war, commenting: "They asked me to say some things." Thus, he puts himself in the role of an awkward supplicant first, and a pawn of the Parliament second, unable to speak for himself. The only subject he feels comfortable discussing with FDR is the burden of royal responsibility, his self-pitying maladjustment to this role ("They didn't want me as their king," he complains, to which the president soberly answers: "I didn't know they voted for that in England"), and the male bonding over backbiting their wives. After the conversation he returns to Elizabeth delighted with Roosevelt, reporting that he has told the president about a mishap at the coronation ceremony, when the crown was put on his head the wrong way. The Queen reproaches him for joking about himself on such a delicate mission, but George seems to have forgotten about the purpose of the visit altogether. Instead, he is glad that he can finally let off some steam, be seen as a human being and not a king, showing himself to be rather weak, childish, and in need of Roosevelt's fatherly approval.

However, it is precisely these qualities that result in King George's final victory, as they make him not only "unkingly" but also "un-English." As Andrew Higson notes, while "the formality of the monarchy" is ridiculed in the film, "the King is portrayed as a sympathetic, flawed character who is drawn out of his shell by Roosevelt's down-to-earth Americanness" (2016, 347). It is the dreaded hotdog meal that becomes a symbol of the two nations' new bond: while the Queen does not want her husband to eat a hotdog, he publically takes an impressive bite, showing himself to be "one of the people" and gathering applause. Elizabeth must admit that the Americans are not as hostile after all and hotdogs are not as bad. In the end, the King and Queen may leave the U.S. happy, feeling that their mission has been accomplished. The cultural conflict, however, has ended in America's conquest of Great Britain. The royal couple has not only won the hearts of the Americans by showing their accessible, i.e., "un-English," side, but also changed their own opinion about the hostility and savagery of the U.S. Just like *Downton* is a story of Harold's conversion to Anglophilia, *Hyde Park* depicts a similar change in the King and Queen of England.

Interestingly, historically it was the American people who underwent a transformation thanks to the royal visit. Before, the King and Queen were not particularly popular in the United States, not only because of their representing a system at odds with the American republican spirit, but also because of personal reasons: George VI's bother, Edward VIII, was seen as more glamorous, and his American wife, Wallis Simpson, as insulted by the royal family, who forced Edward to abdicate and refused her the title of Her Royal Highness (Johnson 2021, 335). This, combined with American isolationist sentiment after World War I, resulted in the royal couple's arrival in the U.S. being preceded by very negative media coverage, accusing them of coming for American money (Johnson 2021, 339–41; Leahy 1990, 444). It was the monarchs' great success

that after all this initial ill feeling, the visit was ultimately seen as "a great public relations triumph" (Johnson 2021, 344) – they met with such enthusiasm that the cheering crowds significantly prolonged their visit in New York City, making it impossible to complete the full itinerary (Leahy 1990, 447) – quite a contrast with the film's sad scene of the King being ignored by the American farmer in an empty field. While the British ambassador feared that a stay at Hyde Park would "emphasize the 'personal nature of the visit too much for American opinion'" (Leahy 1990, 438), Roosevelt's instinct, which made him insist on Hyde Park, proved right: it was precisely this semi-informal, personal side of the monarchs that Americans wanted to see. However, if there was, indeed, a conversion, it was not, as the film suggests, the King and Queen who changed from "just another posh, repressed British couple in formal wear" (Higson 2016, 354) to more relaxed and worldly hotdog lovers, but the American public opinion that shifted from "warnings about entangling alliances to glowing comments about the common Anglo-American heritage" (Leahy 1990, 448).

Although both productions discussed here focus on a similar era and refer to the same stereotypes, their portrayals of the Anglo-American relations seem to be the opposite: at first glance, *Downton* prefers the British, while *Hyde Park* sides with the Americans (coincidentally, this corresponds with the nationalities of both films' scriptwriters). At the same time, on a surface level, similarities abound: the cultural conflict between the two nations is, in both cases, portrayed through stereotypes which can be traced back to the nineteenth century. In both, American servants are incompetent, the Britons are better mannered, and shocked by American informality and egalitarianism, yet are in need of American money. Interestingly, such discursive elements served nineteenth-century Britons to prove their superiority to the young republic; this is not, however, the case of the discussed films. If in *Hyde Park* president Roosevelt is depicted as unfaithful and unsophisticated, he is still the father of the royal visit's success. The King, on the other hand, is not only showed as dependent on American money, but also as suffocating within the formal constraints of the British system. He comes to the U.S. not only on a diplomatic mission, but also to receive a lesson in life; to get "Americanized," which will make him both a more sympathetic person and a better ruler.

As for *Downton Abbey*'s message, it is less straightforward. Many critics point at the series' identity-building potential: Aakær sees it as a remedy for a crisis of Britishness in the contemporary multicultural U.K. (Rydeberg Aakær, n.d., 7); Baena and Byker speak similarly of a crisis of the "English sense of ethnicity" (2014, 3); Byrne makes a parallel between the Thatcherite era, when the heritage film originated, and the present time "of equal comparable unrest, financial crisis, and Conservative-dominated government" (2014, 315). All these authors read *Downton* as a conservative and nostalgic portrayal of the past, which gives the viewer a possibility to escape the challenges of the present and provide him/her with a feeling of safety and stability. Harold's "conversion" in the discussed episode, which shows him as an American finally ready to accept British superiority, might support this interpretation. This, however, is a one-sided view of the series, which is not as comforting as the critics' statements might suggest: after all, even Baena

and Byker point to the fact that "The sinking of the Titanic, set at the beginning of the story, symbolizes the disappearance of an old way of life" (2014, 4). The series' creator, Julian Fellowes, sees the opening shots of each episode showing the beautiful estate in all its glory – the "lamps, soft furnishings, and other domestic objects, which are the historically authentic props that make the series a pleasurable spectacle for the viewer" (Byrne 2015, 178) – as ironic, since *Downton Abbey* "would trace the decline of this particular class" (Fellowes qtd. in Mattisson 2014, 4). While the way of life represented by Downton is certainly valued positively in the series, its main theme is trying to cope with change in times which offer less and less stability to everyone, also the aristocrats whose world is becoming a thing of the past. The conversation between Lady Violet and Mrs. Levinson, implying that the future belongs to the latter, makes *Downton*'s message not so different from *Hyde Park*'s after all.

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