

## Career

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THE “career” is one of the most important concepts driving academic discourse in Victorian studies—and much of English studies—today. Part of the reason for the career’s importance to academia has to do with the fact that ours is one of the few professional areas that still holds out the possibility of a career trajectory similar to the one that, during the decades from about the 1850s and the 1980s, structured millions of individuals’ ambitions. Today, workers in almost all areas of the Western economy face job prospects that are radically unpredictable and unstable, which means that few even imagine following linear, predictable career-paths. Thus, a much different term—precarity—has come to describe the occupational prospects of those in the contemporary work force.

Yet, a path of predictability and stability for educated workers was exactly what the “career” offered when it was established during the nineteenth century. As Nicholas Dames has shown, the Civil Service reforms of the 1850s, along with the rationalization of colonial governance in India, gave rise to a new narrative of professional success.<sup>1</sup> This kind of success rewarded expertise in the administration of bureaucratic tasks; prominence came to those who achieved seniority or rose within “pre-scheduled channels” to the top of an organizational hierarchy established according to values of efficiency and stability.<sup>2</sup> As Max Weber suggested at the beginning of the twentieth century, the modern “career” differed in important respects from the older ideals of promotion, in which success derived from the securing of “individual privileges and bestowal of favor.”<sup>3</sup> The modern career required specific skills, not diverse abilities or loyalty to a particular ruler or official, and a person’s career path proceeded according to externally constructed steps that depended, at least in theory, on rational, meritocratic evaluations.<sup>4</sup>

When Pierre Bourdieu was writing *Homo Academicus* (1984), one of the first extensive analyses of intellectuals’ relationships to institutional hierarchies, Western culture’s reigning conception of a professional occupation was still this narrative one of the bureaucratic career. Like those who began corporate, civil-service, legal, and other careers, academics entering the professoriate were choosing to take part in an “obstacle race where everyone classifies and everyone is classified, the best classified becoming the best classifiers of those who enter the race,” as Bourdieu put it.<sup>5</sup> In academia, the hurdles along this linear obstacle

course seem clear: they include a tenure-track job, tenure, promotion to full professor, and the accumulation of other signs of prestige (the ability to get hired at a higher-ranked department, prizes, invitations to deliver keynote addresses, etc.).

Despite, or because of, the decades-long erosion of the opportunities for junior scholars to enter this defined academic career-path, such a path has become the focus of immense amounts of commentary. This discourse has taken the form of articles, essays, websites, and guidebooks advising academics how to prepare successfully for the job market, how to publish articles, how to navigate tenure requirements, and how to meet universities' teaching and service requirements. At times, it can seem as if entire sections of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* have been set aside for humanities professors to provide advice about academic careers and to discuss the difficulties of maintaining one. Scholars of the nineteenth century have also trained their attention on the historical roots of academic professionalization. Gerald Graff's *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987) laid the groundwork for subsequent studies on how intellectual work in English studies became institutionalized and bureaucratized. Other works, including Evan Watkins's *Work Time: English Departments and the Circulation of Cultural Value* (1989), Michael Bérubé's *The Employment of English: Theory, Jobs, and the Future of Literary Studies* (1996), Catherine Gallagher's "The History of Literary Criticism" (1997), and historian Julie Reuben's *The Making of the Modern University: Intellectual Transformation And The Marginalization Of Morality* (1996) all contributed to making the academic career the object of research.

Thus, by the 1990s, when the job-market crisis overtook theory as the dominant topic of conversations among literary scholars, literary critics could write about careers as a way to further their own. At the same time, the concept of the career had started to transform itself in the business and public worlds. As a way of registering capitalism's increasing reliance on temporary workers, the "career" has come to name any sequence of jobs an individual has held, not a single, defined track. Douglas Hall, a prominent scholar of business employment, calls this new kind of occupational track the "protean" or "boundaryless" career, to differentiate it from the more linear narrative one that was established in Victorian England. As he writes in his 2002 book, *Careers In and Out of Organizations* (2002), the protean career has become common owing to the increasingly swift pace of economic change, a sense of permanent "turbulence," and the "tremendous increase in self-employment, independent contracting, private consultants, entrepreneurship, and the like" driven by finance

capitalism's and information technology's disruptive effects.<sup>6</sup> Academia's reliance on adjunct, non-tenure-track faculty is part of the trend Hall recognizes; his "protean career" can be viewed as a redemptive term describing the precarity that temporary workers, including academics, face.

When Victorianists have not written about academic careers directly, they have, since the 1990s, examined the history of associated concepts. The birth of "professions" in the Victorian era has attracted particular attention; examples of literary critics analyzing professionalization include Mary Poovey's "The Man-of-Letters Hero: *David Copperfield* and the Professional Writer" in *Uneven Developments* (1988), Monica Feinberg Cohen's *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work and Home* (1998), and Richard Salmon's recent *The Formation of the Victorian Literary Profession* (2015), among many others. And, the idea of the literary career has become an important analytic concept in several examinations of aesthetic and formal elements in Victorian literature; these include David Kurnick's *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (2011) and my own *From Sketch to Novel: The Development of Victorian Fiction* (2009). Much of the field of Victorian book and media history, with its attention to modern mechanisms of publication, profit, and celebrity, might also be seen as an expression of academics' career-minded interests: in today's scholarly field, publication plays a key role in advancement, and because scholars are rewarded for understanding its processes, it makes sense that they might direct their gaze toward analogous processes in the 1800s.

Our attention to the advent of structured professional careers in the nineteenth century as well as to the dynamics affecting careers today testifies, perhaps, to an anxious nostalgia among today's scholars for viable, legible career paths in an era of precarity, or to our deep investments in the security afforded by tenure-track careers, even as they disappear for most workers. More generally, this attention, along with the copious amounts of writing about the academic job market, suggests that contemporary issues about academics' professional, class, and economic status, as well as about the structures that define academics' jobs, define the objects of our analysis and research.

#### NOTES

1. Nicholas Dames, "Trollope and the Career: Vocational Trajectories and the Management of Ambition," *Victorian Studies* 45, no. 2 (2003): 247–78.

2. Celia Moore, Hugh Gunz, and Douglas T. Hall, "Tracing the Historical Roots Of Career Theory in Management and Organization Studies," in *Handbook of Career Studies*, ed. Hugh Gunz and Maury Peiperl (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007), 18.
3. Max Weber, *Economy and Society*, ed. and trans. by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (1921; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), 958.
4. As Weber states in his chapter on "Bureaucracy" in *Economy and Society*, the bureaucratic official is "set for a 'career' within [a] hierarchical order. . . . He expects to move from the lower, less important and less well paid, to the higher position. The average official naturally desires a mechanical fixing of the conditions of promotion" (963).
5. Pierre Bourdieu, *Homo Academicus*, trans. Peter Collier (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), 217.
6. Donald Hall, *Careers In and Out of Organizations* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 6.



## Caribbean

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ALTHOUGH I'm not sure Raymond Williams would approve, this Victorian keyword essay begins with a twenty-first-century keyword search. Using the University of Miami's *Project Muse* subscription, a search for "Caribbean" in the journal *Victorian Studies* since 2000 yields 46 items, of which only ten are full-length articles. Perhaps unsurprisingly for a field that embeds a British monarch in its name, keyword searches in *Victorian Studies* for British geographical locations result in far more hits: 243 for Edinburgh, 293 for Manchester, and 1,462 for London. By this measure, the Caribbean is about as important as Brighton (40) and Newcastle (47). When *Victorian Studies* focuses on imperial and international topics, India (389), America (348), Ireland (291), and Australia (208) count as much more important than the Caribbean. Comparisons to journals in American literary and cultural studies are instructive: *Early American Literature* (159 results for "Caribbean" since 2000) and *Early American Studies* (112 results since 2003) are far more Caribbean-focused. Most