Guy Davidson, Nicola Evans (eds.), *Literary Careers in the Modern Era*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire, 2015. IX, 240 pp. $90.

The idea of having or pursuing a "literary career" is quite old (Virgil is the prime example here), but the drive to examine it is comparatively new. This particular brand of hermeneutic methodology—the so-called "career criticism"—which essentially extended critical theory into the field of genetic criticism (the continental version of textual and intentional criticism) first developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One possible explanation for this late bloom is the anti-authorial and anti-intentionalist perspectives which dominated literary theory in the twentieth century. The editors of this collection, Guy Davidson and Nicola Evans, straightforwardly recognize that career criticism intersects with other areas of scholarship (including sociology, literary reputation, literary afterlives and, last but not least, literary celebrity) and point to Edward Said's work as a starting point of career studies. Davidson and Evans note that Said, in *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), "included 50 pages of richly suggestive discussion of the topic as part of a chapter on the genesis of a literary work. Said pointed out that between the writer's life and the writer's text lay a rich territory almost untouched by critics: the making and unmaking of a literary career" (p. 2).

It is obvious that what career criticism has in common with phenomenological criticism, for instance, is that it tries to explain the total oeuvre of a writer, from beginning to end, focusing solely on the literary rather than the biographical ("the idea that literary output follows discernible patterns of development is also a bedrock assumption of much literary criticism", p. 7). The major problem with career criticism, however, lies in that it doesn't provide a clear or even a working definition of authorship. An author's career is instead defined multiple times. Patrick Cheney, for instance, defined it in *European Literary Careers: The Author from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (2002) as that period in which a writer can be seen to plot his life as a sequence of literary works that stage both his and the work's development. Guy Davidson and Nicola Evans convincingly refined the concept by showing that the writing life is unpredictably determined by both external and internal forces (careers have "multiple sources that feed them"). Consequently, the modern authorial career is "both individually determined and a product of social relations" (p. 14). It is exactly this interaction of outward and inward powers that shape modern literary careers that is investigated here.

The contributors are interested in reexamining the commonplace images of modern and contemporary writers by focusing on the dynamic functions of literary careers. However, most of them examine modern literary careers by close-reading key passages from various novels, a practice which seems, at best, counterintuitive. Without discussing power relations, the role of institutions and real life practices, career criticism would only represent the equivalent of that type of literary sociology which restrictively discusses narrative themes. Though it successfully avoids old fashioned biographical criticism, career criticism becomes its own worst enemy when adopting formalist reading strategies. Luckily, this is not entirely the case. The absence of plot, for instance, is intelligently linked to an unpredictable career path. This is to say that the

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modern writer is "nevertheless keen to resist the 'dispersion' of his writings into 'a bunch of scattered occasions'" (p. 7). There is a direct relationship between one's literary career and the course of one's writing.

The modern understanding of the literary career is, of course, indebted to the 19th century Romantic definition of authorship and geniality. However, the *cursus honorum* supplied the model for the literary career of someone like Virgil (a progression from lower to higher genres: from pastoral, to georgic, to epic). As the editors note, "Said's crucial contribution to the idea of the modern literary career was to subvert any sense of a career as a continuous progression towards maturity" (p. 8). What separates poetic vocation from the self-authored career is the latter's definition as assemblage (and its lack of models on how to build a literary career). Said's restrictive definition of the modern literary writer's ethos (the existential uncertainty and difficulty surrounding his or her writing processes) represents one of the major downsides of his otherwise impressive project. This is something the editors actually take into consideration, but they don't offer any alternatives.

The editors claims that "work on the modern literary career has thus far been sporadic and often carried out by scholars apparently unaware of the work done by others" (p. 3). Unfortunately, to some extent this also seems to be true for the work under review here, thereby illustrating the dynamic of "patchiness" and "stop-start nature" of career studies that they themselves have identified (p. 4). For example, when asking questions like "What is the relationship between an author's life and his writing life?" the editors seem to be unaware of other important historical contributions, such as Marcel Proust's famous distinction—to name just one—between the social self and the deep self (*Contre Sainte-Beuve*): "un livre est le produit d'un autre moi que celui que nous manifestons dans nos habitudes, dans la société, dans nos vices". A discussion of Roland Barthes' "Preparation of the Novel" could've proved itself similarly useful, especially when describing modern writing as including "the life before the literary career as part of the effort to understand how the production of text begins" (p. 3).

One preliminary remark before we delve into the individual contributions: though the collection claims to offer "the first sustained treatment of the diversity of modern and contemporary literary careers" through its investigation of "canonical and noncanonical authors from diverse national and diasporic backgrounds in relation to a range of ancillary concerns—including political commitment, popularity, sexuality, gender, and race" (p. 4), but unfortunately this inclusivity does no range beyond the Anglophone sphere.

Chene Heady's essay (p. 19-38) is a finely tuned deconstruction of individual authorship, outlining how G. K. Chesterton succeeded in rebuilding his career by paradoxically embracing his reputation as a buffoon, deriving his authority from his connection to the masses. Here are some of Heady's subtle observations: "Chesterton narrates Chesterbelloc with some combination of endorsement and light mockery, as an obvious truth which Shaw has mistaken for a melodramatic scandal" (p. 28). If modernists were elitist, Chesterton was a traditional populist. He was the master of the apologia. Not only did he unpick the savaging cult of the solitary genius, but he also offered a descriptive vision of what authorship should actually look like. He "entirely befuddles any notion of a division between author and audience" (p. 33). Chene Heady shows that authorship, authority, and inspiration are constantly deferred in Chesterton's *Autobiography*.

Through a careful reading of Norman Mailer's *Advertisements for Myself* (published in 1959), John O'Brien (p. 39-56) fascinatingly shows how literary celebrity could

actually be drafted as the complete opposite of literary greatness. The author "sheds light on the competing pressures of celebrity and career on novelists at the start of the television era" (p. 10). It is important to note that fame is pictured as having its own exacting rules and rigors: "Mailer elaborates upon the artistic and existential crisis caused by the [...] impact of literary celebrity on literary career at the beginning of a period of new electronic mass communication" (p. 39). The increasing impact of celebrity equates to the compromise of literary production. The major writer is at odds with commercialism, as is the solitary genius with a corporation's marketing strategies or, finally, "the vestiges of the idea of great books and great writers and the irrepressible logic of the market" (p. 43). In other words, media (mis)representations are powerful instruments of developing or destroying one's literary career. Mailer explores, as O'Brien explains, the ways in which his sense of self and career might survive within the electronic media landscape: "Mailer collects his own incursions into various media, and uses these incursions to build an alternative vision of the writing self" (p. 54). O'Brien seems to conclude that celebrity has become the public face—the only face—of authorship in the age of media technologies.

One legacy, as the editors remind us, of the vocational model of the literary career is the expectation that the late stage of an author's work will represent his or her crowning achievement. An alternative is to read literary development as inevitably leading to exhaustion. By introducing the concept of "the retrospective stage" ("the state in a career reached by some authors who are continuing to produce work in the wake of great success in the past", p. 11), Hywel Dix (p. 57-73) succeeds in circumventing both models. How does one produce work in the wake of great success in the past? By or through a reflexive and critical return to the themes and techniques of one's earlier works. Ending on an optimistic note, Dix concludes that, by gaining a metafictive character, "the late career stage is still as creative as the other stages" (p. 72).

Jeff Solomon (p. 77-95) investigates the ways in which Gertrude Stein's celebrity persona influenced her literary career. He diligently shows that "celebrity scholarship revolves in great part around the relationship between 'star' and public, with special attention to the creation and distribution of a star's light" (p. 78). By contrast, career studies are "more concerned with an author's internal relationship with a corpus" (p. 78). Celebrity extends beyond literary work. By tracking the development of Stein's fame alongside her literary output, Jeff Solomon explores the complicated relationship between her career and her celebrity persona. Authorship is thus not only defined by a writer's relationship with his or her literary work, but also by the relationship between the individual creator and his or her public persona, as Solomon suggests: "audiences primed by their own same-sexual erotics and identity were able to recognize and benefit from Stein's specifically lesbian memoir and persona, even as her broad queerness allowed a sustained if mistaken commercial kiss" (p. 94).

Guy Davidson (p. 96-112) investigates why James Baldwin's homosexuality did not detract from his literary success. Davidson suggests that Baldwin's career as a famous literary homosexual, despite his disavowal of gay identity, started representing "a crucial point of identification and aspiration for the post-liberation generation of gay and lesbian writers of all races" (p. 109).

Elizabeth McMahon (p. 113-128) tracks the parallels and misalignment of self-placement and history in Dionne Brand's work. She further uncovers the full range of dualities underpinning Brand's vision (career and vocation, text and author, life choices and life imperatives): "like Said, Brand's personal history, authorial life, and her writing are embedded in the experience of exile as it is directly related to the political

experience of colonialism and war" (p. 117). McMahon concludes that Brand's oeuvre endlessly replays the relationship between the writer and his or her career, in order to extend the text beyond its limits: "this impossibility is focused in and by the textual subjects, especially the narrative voice or autobiographical speaker, whose death is repeatedly rehearsed as a predicate of textual production" (p. 126).

Leigh Dale's contribution (p. 129-143) appears to be more in tune with recent developments like Bruno Latour's work, where agency is permanently distributed within several networks. In a sense, Dale strives to overcome the modernist understanding of the self-conscious individual author. He goes on to show that a career is not necessarily manageable. A career isn't, he asserts, something about which authors have choices. There is no definite relationship between the writer, the writing, and the writing life. Finally, we see that "the third and most important reason for using this eccentric definition of career lies in the writing of Tsolkias [...] which reflect tensions between the Tsolkias agenda, and the desire of critics and reviews to impose coherence" (p. 130). Dale brilliantly demonstrates that Tsolkias is extremely passionate about understanding the social breakdown caused by capitalism, and the hyperinflation of hate caused by poverty and deprivation that leads to violence against the self and others. Moreover, we find out that, for Tsolkias, a career is always mobile. The commodification of experience and affectivity flips labor into leisure, just as the economy of literature—the professional practice of criticism—flips reading into labor: "something of the experience of reading literary works must become 'laborious', not (merely) pleasure, but work, directed towards self-improvement; the pleasures of the text are those of self-improvement" (p. 142).

Paul Sharrad (p. 147-166) marks out a new approach to studying how literary careers are forged, taking into account multiple networks of value in the production, reception, and international circulation of an author's work, specifically that of Thomas Keneally. Gary Lee Stonum has described the literary career as operating via feedback loops (writers process their own reflections on their work and its reception to create an oeuvre that is ever-improvising in technique and depth of vision), as Paul Sharrad reminds his readers. Postcolonial cultural politics and new media technologies, among many other factors, disrupt the model of the feedback loop, especially when contemporary literature is discussed in terms of the international publishing marketplace. The writer who can make enough sales to keep publishers interested could make a living. Keneally's international profile was gauged by surveying translated editions of his novels. Sharrad concludes: "the more international his career becomes, the more his reputation fades at home" (p. 154). Nonetheless, postmodernism, cultural studies, and ecological concerns are some of the most important factors in Australia's cultural industry shift from cultural nationalism to transnationalism. As Sharrad neatly puts it, Keneally rides out the commercialization of publishing and the author. He was no longer an author or a novelist, but a personality. His international success pushed him even more into nonliterary media spaces. Media profiles tend to replace one's literary fiction: "a multisystem interactive feedback model for studying the career of the modern writer [...] is one means of approximating an answer" to what a literary career is in an increasingly globalized market (p. 160).

Nicola Evans (p. 167-183) considers—in a theoretical investigation—the room or the space in which authors write. In other words, Evans invites us to step into the house of literature in order to look at "all kinds of things that critics have been previously required to leave outside the door" (p. 170). It is important to note that Evans underlines the fact that genetic criticism can also be construed as resurrecting the

authority of the author through its focus on the author's intentions and strategies as these are revealed in the working notes" (p. 171). In her view, career criticism sits at the intersection of literary tourism, on the one hand, and literary criticism, on the other. By studying the so-called avant text, the researcher can recreate the author's voice. The writer's room is, indeed, a logical extension of the gradual erosion of the line that separates texts from the material world. By exploring the concept of the literary career, the critic examines the relationship between the author's work and his or her personal life or, to be more precise, "the life lived during the process of writing" (p. 173).

The last two essays are intriguing, but they seem to lack conclusions. They are both concerned with the ways in which the career pathways of authorship are changing in response to the wholesale transformation of the publishing industry by digital technologies. Should we still call it the publishing industry if no publishing is actually being done? Such questions remain, of course, unanswered, but Mohanalaksmi Rajakumar and Rumsha Shazad (p. 184-195) are focused on determining whether the shift towards online publishing has been good for women writers. The authors are investigating the ways in which the Internet is enabling efforts to focus attention and action on gender inequalities in the publishing industry. By juxtaposing independent publishing to the so-called legacy publishing, the essay "examines the experience of the female 'indie' author—a term characterizing women who self-publish online—to offer some preliminary evidence of how the digital era is impacting the literary careers of women" (p. 185).

"Now that everyone is potentially an author in the blogosphere, how have the methods of certifying the 'legitimate' literary author changed?". This is the question to which Laura Dietz strives in offering an answer to in the volume's final essay (p. 196-214). She examines the ways in which self-publishing redefined the relationship between the traditional author and the amateur. The publishing industry has been transformed by the digital environment (books without pages and authors without editors). New authorship is proudly defined as illegitimate authorship—not (or not only) someone who writes professionally, but simply someone who writes books. The signal difference, Dietz shows, between a proper book contract and a shady one is constituted by the financial offer. Contemporary authorship requires promotion and publishers require that such promotion include digital presence for authors (the new form of avant-garde). What ultimately separates the legitimate/author from the illegitimate/aspirant is—Dietz writes—a matter of motive (the epitext is a key tactic in the authorship of new authorship). While the new disruptive functions of illegitimate writing expand the author's roles, self-publishing is defined in relation to the credentials offered by mainstream publishing.

Alex Ciorogar
Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca