

# Rebecca Gower



## Career prospects of an English student: Is tea-making a transferable skill?

It's a terribly stressful experience being in the third year, especially if you're an English student. Almost everyone I know has exams, or a dissertation (or, in some unlucky cases, both); while I don't actually have either. Well, I have a solitary exam at the beginning of next term (which I prefer not to think about), but otherwise, it's all about the assessed essays. Perhaps I ought to be grateful, but I'm not, as I seem to have to spend half my time defending my degree, and that's stressful enough in itself. The feeling amongst many of my friends seems to be that English students just can't understand what work is.

Added to that, the whole career issue is currently rearing its ugly head. The festive season was utter hell: everyone—each of my relatives in turn and people I didn't even recognise—wanted to know what I plan to do with the rest of my life. My stock reply was "Oh, I don't know, but I'm sure I'll think of something eventually", said as cheerfully as I could manage. It was a bad answer which always got the same response: a look of pity, which suggested that by now, I really ought to have a graduate job lined up. After a while, I abandoned the fake jollity, and just mumbled, "I might go travelling". It's a patent lie—there's no way on earth I could be bothered to organise myself to go off on a gap year—but it seemed to satisfy people.

According to one careers talk, the best thing to do is work out what you want from a job first. Well, that's easy, as I have no ambition whatsoever: I want maximum job security, minimum responsibil-

ity, and I'm not really bothered about money. (Yes, yes, it'd be nice to be wealthy, but not so nice that I'm prepared to sell my soul. I'm simply too lazy.) Oh, and I don't want to fight off hundreds of other people in order to get a job, I don't really fancy my chances. In fact, if I could get a job without having to have an interview, that'd be perfect. Unfortunately, there are no graduate jobs answering that description (as far as I can tell, every graduate job involves 'fierce' competition); and, having had a ridiculous amount of money shelled out on my education over the years, I don't think my family would take too kindly to me wanting to work in a book shop.

No, my parents have other ideas. When I was about 13, I was foolish enough to announce that I wanted to become a lawyer (it was around the time *Ally McBeal* started), and my father has always loved the idea. I finally convinced him that law was not where my ambitions lie, whereupon he said, "You've got a great business mind". I have no idea where he plucked that from, and everyone I've repeated it to has laughed uproariously (and, I might add, tactlessly) at the notion. My mother, meanwhile, is a teacher, who hates her job and is counting down the years to retirement. Her suggestion? "Why don't you become a teacher?" I told her I'd think about it.

So, none of that helped me. Undeterred (well, quite deterred, actually, but driven along by a considerable measure of panic), I took stock of everything I've done in my life, and how it could help me in



Legal firms in the real world require more than a nice mini-skirt and volumising hair mousse

**'If I could get a job without having to have an interview, that would be perfect.'**

the future. Previous employment? A chambermaid, on and off; a job from which I was fired for being so appallingly bad. I did manage (after weeks of trying) to learn how to do hospital corners, and I quite enjoyed polishing brass, but apart from that, the only thing I picked up was a real loathing of anyone prepared to spend several hundred pounds on one night in a hotel. I don't think that counts as a 'trans-

ferable skill'. However, I did learn a few Polish phrases from a fellow chambermaid. That probably counts as 'conversational Polish', so I can stick that on my CV.

As for university, my extracurricular activities don't amount to much. In the first year, I devoted a lot of time to making tea, and I slept quite a lot. I didn't involve myself in any societies. I did hitchhike to Dublin for RAG, but that was less about philanthropy than the prospect of a weekend in Dublin with friends. In the second year, I perfected the art of tea-making. Now I've reached my final couple of terms, the fear has taken over, and I'm actually getting more involved: this, for example. Only, I don't want to be a journalist.

I swear, the whole career industry is just a giant meat market. After much thought, I've decided that I might want to be a librarian. Possibly. And my friends seem to think it would suit me. So I'm sorted. Or at least, I was, until someone told me that being a librarian is more stressful than being a fire fighter. I really, hope they were joking.

## The comfort of being 20 going on 45

In terms of my aspirations to become the most boring person I know, 2006 had an auspicious start. While my brother celebrated in Edinburgh and my parents were out getting drunk with the neighbours, I sat at home and dithered at length over the programme with which I should usher in the new year. Should it be the BBC extravaganza, presented by, among others, the incomparable Andrew Marr? Or would it be better to watch *The Year We Won The*

Ashes? In the end, I went for the latter. It was only right, given that the cricket was pretty much my highlight of 2005. So, when my parents staggered in some time after 1am, they found me cheering loudly at the television as Andrew Strauss reached his century in the fifth Test. Oh, the memories. When I finally went to bed, I was still so overjoyed that England had won that it took me ages to get to sleep. Honestly, it's pathetic.

Well, I say pathetic, but I

don't mean it. This is the year that I turn twenty-one, after all. It's therefore entirely appropriate that I should embrace the middle aged person inside myself. Laundry is the closest thing I have to a hobby; I quite want to take up knitting, if only I could find someone to teach me. My favourite part of the day is when I sit down in the evening to watch the Channel Four news, to see what tie-and-socks combination Jon Snow is sporting.

My friends keep telling me

that I need to break out of the 'comfort zone'. Many seem to think I should feel ashamed. "You're not even middle-aged," exclaimed one housemate, "you're more like... approaching retirement!" "Ah well," I replied, waving my hand. I have no problem admitting it. My days of careless hedonism (was I carelessly hedonistic? I don't remember) are behind me. From now on, I'm a committed Radio 4 listener (average age: fifty-four), and proud of it.