

*Killing Thinking: The Death of the Universities* by Mary Evans (Continuum, London, 2004) ISBN 0-8264- 7312-1 (hardback, £65); 0-8264- 7313-X (paperback, £22.50). Pp. 172 + x.

Mary Evans is Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Kent at Canterbury. One key to her book was given by Dr Johnson in the preface to his Dictionary (1755): 'Those who have much leisure to think, will always be enlarging the stock of ideas . . .' Another key is from a speaker at an Oxford college Gaudy dinner in Oxford graduate Dorothy L Sayers' 1935 novel *Gaudy Night*: 'Oxford has been called the home of lost causes: if the love of learning for its own sake is a lost cause everywhere else in the world, let us see to it that here, at least, it finds its abiding home' (p 31). Now, one gathers from this book, it is a lost cause everywhere in Britain.

Professor Evans cites the philistine Dearing Report (1997), which contained not a word about producing scholars, or learning for its own sake. It has led to expansion of recruitment coupled with 'the surveillance and standardization of the academy'. This has produced the translation of the universities from relative independence to integration into the values of the market economy.

*Killing Thinking* condemns 'the conceptual illiteracy of the culture of audit and assessment which now dominates English universities'. This has introduced so-called benchmarking, where those in charge of a subject are required to establish exactly what a graduate in that subject should know. So much for the untrammelled flow of ideas and intellectual excitement which introduction to a learned topic has hitherto been supposed to let loose. Now all are pinned down, assessed, measured, and reassessed, till the lamp of learning almost ceases to glow. 'Since God no longer exists', says Mary Evans, 'we have invented assessment'.

*Note* This summarizes the much longer review which will be found at <http://www.francisbennion.com/pdfs/fb/2005/2005-001-killing-thinking.pdf> (2005.001).

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