

## The Art of Teaching

*The Art of Teaching* by Jay Parini (Oxford University Press 2005) ISBN-10: 0-19-516969-0 (hardback). Pp. 160 + xiv.

I have made a habit of enthusiasm, says Professor Jay Parini in this elegantly produced pocket-sized mix of memoir and manual. Parini, 56-year old Axinn Professor of English at Middlebury College in Vermont (founded 1800), is also a novelist and poet. He has taught at St Andrews and Oxford as well as in America, and has much that is useful to say about what he thinks of as an art (as well as a technique, a chore, and much else besides).

Today's test-orientated teaching strikes Parini as anti-educational. The real aim of teaching is to awaken the student's potential. The present system of rigid testing seems to him woefully misdirected and ruinous to learning.

Learning requires the teacher to be learned. Not only does the good teacher know his or her material, the teacher loves the material. That sentiment is quickly communicated to the pupil. Clearly Jay Parini is in love with his subject, and has made it a part of his life.

Parini holds that the good teacher wears a mask and puts on a performance for the class. He or she dons a persona, from the Latin for sounding through (*per sona*) a mask as in ancient Greek theatre. After much teaching experience, Parini is "perhaps a little more willing to play with the mask in front of the class, wiggle it free, peek round its fiery shield".

I left this fascinating book with the impression that all teachers at university level would profit from it. Some may even find it inspiring.

*Note* The above summarizes the much longer review which will be found at <http://www.francisbennion.com/pdfs/fb/2005/2005-023-art-of-teaching-long.pdf>