UNIVERSITIES

AT WAR

THOMAS DOCHERTY

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In 1976 SAGE published a series of short 'university papers', which led to the publication of the QASS series (or the 'little green books' as they became known to researchers). Almost 40 years since the release of the first 'little green book', SAGE is delighted to offer a new series of swift, short and topical pieces in the ever-growing digital environment.

SAGE *Swifts* offer authors a new channel for academic research with the freedom to deliver work outside the conventional length of journal articles. The series aims to give authors speedy access to academic audiences through digital first publication, space to explore ideas thoroughly, yet at a length which can be readily digested, and the quality stamp and reassurance of peer-review.

Thomas Docherty not only is a brilliant critic of those forces that would like to transform higher education into an extension of the market-place and a recruiting tool for the conformist prone, low-paid workforce needed by corporate powers, he is also a man of great moral and civic courage, who under intense pressure from the punishing neoliberal state has risked a great deal to remind us that higher education is a civic institution crucial to creating the formative cultures necessary for a democracy to survive, if not flourish.

Universities at War is both insightful and accessible, and one of the most important books published that deals with the ongoing attacks being waged worldwide on higher education. Docherty defines the university as a worldly institution that cannot be separated from the economic, social, cultural, and political forces in which it is shaped and acts. Few writers make the case for the civic purpose of higher education, for its centrality to democracy, and for its responsibility to educate young people and others to be engaged, critical citizens of the world. This book is a tour de force.

Professor Henry Giroux, McMaster University, Canada

Few people in the UK are able and willing to trace the current university crisis to its cultural, political and economic roots and to challenge the reigning policy orthodoxy in print. None has experienced the war against the universities with anything like the ferocity visited upon Thomas Docherty in 2014. The unique witness of this urgent book demands close attention.

Professor Howard Hotson, St Anne's College, Oxford University

This is the polemos of Thomas Docherty, both polemic and war. It is a polemic about the struggle for the university and the right to higher education. It does not just report that war but participates fully in the ongoing debate, taking a position against the market and in the name of the academy. Docherty is one of our finest literary critics whose writing on the university illuminates its corridors. This is another important intervention by a true resistant for critical thought and the university.

Professor Martin McQuillan, Kingston University

With Stefan Collini, Thomas Docherty is a major contemporary heir to Newman, a defender of a sober, principled, honourable, sophisticated, demanding and by no means idealized concept of the university; this when, in the UK, actual universities sometimes seem increasingly populated by aliens from outer space. The serious intellectual life is in danger of being ruthlessly marginalized,

left to a new breed of peripatetic. If this is not to happen, powerful, ferocious, clever, learned books like *Universities at War* are much-needed.

Andrew Gibson, Former Professor of Modern Literature and Theory, Royal Holloway College, University of London

Thomas Docherty's *Universities at War* is a powerful, erudite polemical study of everything that fails to work so drastically in the institution of higher education. Resisting any temptation to proceed with business as usual, Docherty explores and exposes, with wit, insight, and not a little panache, the Realpolitik of the university-as-business. To ignore this book is to be culpable of the crimes against education, in the name of 'education', which Docherty indicts.

Professor Julian Wolfreys, University of Portsmouth

Docherty engages with the secular university in its present crisis, reflecting on its origins and on its role in the future of democracy. He tackles the urgent issue of inequality with a compelling denunciation of the ways of entrenched privilege; he offers a view of governance and representation from the perspective of those who are silenced; and exposes the fundamental damage done to thought by management-speak. Docherty is moral, passionate and committed this is a fierce and important book.

Professor Mary Margaret McCabe, King's College London

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas Docherty is Professor of English and of Comparative Literature in the University of Warwick. He previously held the Chair of English (1867) in Trinity College Dublin, and a Chair Professorship in the University of Kent. He has held many international visiting positions, and has lectured worldwide. He is the author of numerous books, including, most recently, *For the University* (Bloomsbury, 2011), *Confessions: The Philosophy of Transparency* (Bloomsbury, 2012), *The English Question* (Sussex Academic, 2010), *Aesthetic Democracy* (Stanford, 2008). He is currently working on a book about memory, and is also writing an account of some recent events, provisionally called *In Parenthesis: A Year in Suspense*.

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The university sector worldwide is in turmoil. All governments stress the crucial importance of the institution, and, as a result, they interfere with its workings. Paradoxically, the more that politics insists on the importance of the university globally, the more it actually drives the institution away from material realities and from democratic civil engagement. The greatest interference relates to the monetization of all academic work, such that the university institution becomes eviscerated of all content, including intellectual content. Instead, economic factors determine the identity and even the function of our institutions. Money has systematically replaced thought as the key driver and *raison d'être* of the institution's official existence. That priority has consequences, and among the most serious of these is the determination to *manage* knowledge and its people (students, academics and cultures). Management and control of knowledge has become more important than research, teaching or even thinking and living the 'good life' together.

The consequence of this is a peculiar *stasis*: in ancient Greek, the word meant 'civil war' (though, today, it's the sign at a bus stop). This is paradoxical because the university is subjected to continuous 'change-management'. Within the institutions, everything changes, everyday, according to a myth of 'continuous improvement' and 'dynamic management' in our allegedly 'fast-changing global environment'. Oddly, however, everything stays the same within the societies to whose existence the institution is deemed so socially and politically central. Inequality and injustice persist, and ignorance retains all the seductive force of myth.

This book is written in an effort to find out how the university sits between worldliness on one hand and civic relations on the other hand. It follows on from my earlier study, *For the University*; but while that book focused almost entirely on the United Kingdom, the present one addresses the 'global' institution and has a greater scope and ambit. It is an attempt to formulate arguments that will help us discover the proper forms and functions of a university in our contemporary material or worldly predicaments. The stakes for the future of

the institution are extremely high: if the university has a future at all, it has to find its place – even to fight for its place – in the logic of a warring world where civilization itself is endangered.

The final research and writing of this book were carried out under awkward circumstances – while I was suspended from my position at the University of Warwick. During the period of suspension (almost a full year as I write, today, 23 July 2014), I have been supported by family, colleagues and friends. When I was initially suspended, I was told that I was to have no contact with colleagues or students and that, if I did, then such contact would be regarded as actionable under disciplinary procedures that could lead to my summary dismissal from employment. I was also barred from access to campus, and, as a result, some of the documentation for this book has had to be taken from web-sources rather than print-sources, as I could not access the library.

Notwithstanding all this, colleagues and students made contact with me, and, eventually, I was able to communicate at least formally, largely through the efforts of my UCU representative, Dennis Leech. I owe Dennis the gift of that communication, which allowed me to break the enforced isolation imposed on me as a condition of suspension. I want to extend special thanks also to some who maintained close friendly contact, sustaining me throughout: M.M. McCabe, Martin McQuillan, Dan Katz, Carol Rutter and Neil Lazarus. I have had excellent legal and medical support from Ian Besant, Emma-Christine O'Keefe, Katie Lancaster, Paul Greatorex, Katie Lennon, Agi Brenk and Martin Read-Jones. At SAGE, Ziyad Marar, Chris Rojek and Gemma Shields encouraged me in the writing of this book. My debts to all these are incalculable.

I also owe thanks to the many who have found out about my situation, and who have contacted me with messages of support, including Jon Baldwin, Stefan Baumgarten, Eleanor Bell, Jim Byatt, Gordon Campbell, Carlo Caruso, Elizabeth Clarke, Stefan Collini, Nicholas Collins, Nessa Cronin, Valentine Cunningham, Ed Davies, Oliver Davis, Sharae Deckard, Andy Dobson, Dominic Dean, Ana de Medeiros, Paulo de Medeiros, George Donaldson, Robert Eaglestone, Rod Edmond, Alireza Fakhrkonandeh, John Flower, Ross Forman, Larissa Fradkin, Michael Gardiner, Mike Geppert, Andrew Gibson, Lucy Gill, John Gilmore, Priya Gopal, Sorcha Gunne, Paul Hamilton, Simon Head, David Herd, John Holmwood, Howard Hotson, Tony Howard, Michael Hulse, Lyn Innes, Wendy Jacobson, Mary Kelly, Gyorgy Koentges, Nick Lawrence, Caitriona Leahy, Alice Leonard, Graeme Macdonald, Stuart Macdonald, Wallace McDowell, Emma Mason, Jon Mee, David Melville, Drew Milne, Sian Mitchell, Gerald Moore, Philip Moriarty, Emilie Morin, Liz Morrish, Pablo Mukherjee, Stuart Murray, Catalina Neculai, Kerstin Oloff, Tamson Pietsch, Julian Preece, Steve Purcell,

For my students

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INTRODUCTION

... And so I was keen to distinguish crooked from straight,
And to search for truth in the groves of Academe.
But turbulent times snatched me from that sweet spot ...

(Horace, *Epistles*, 2; 2; II. 44–46)[1]

1 TURBULENT TIMES

There is a war on for the future of the university as an institution. We find ourselves, like Horace in my epigraph, in 'turbulent times', and, in many jurisdictions across the world, scholars and students are striving to find ways of responding adequately and appropriately to the disturbances that are afflicting societies in both the advanced and the developing economies. In this, of course, they are not unlike other citizens who face the same social, political and economic predicaments. However, they do have one very particular and specific characteristic that marks out the university as a site of special interest.

The current turbulence – post-2008, post-9/11 and post-Arab Spring – can be seen fundamentally as a very precise ideological contest, in which what has been conventionally called the 'life of the mind' struggles with the material realities of 'life on the street' or, more specifically, on the city squares that have witnessed so many protests in recent times. On the one hand, there is the potential presiding power of ideas and ideals (the proper province of the university, one might perhaps think, at least provisionally) to shape the material conditions in which humans will live together; on the other hand, there is the brute material force of history itself and of *Realpolitik*, which takes precedence over any ideals, and which requires that ideals (and universities where such ideals are explored) adjust themselves pragmatically to realities.

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[1] Trans. A.S. Kline (2005): http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/ HoraceEpistlesBkIIEpII.htm. See also Horace, *Satires, Epistles and Ars Poetics*, ed. and trans. H. Rushton Fairclough (Loeb Classical Library; Heinemann, 1926), 426–427 for bilingual text.

At one abstract philosophical level, this is the conflict between Hegel and Marx; but I want to explore it in more immediate and concrete terms. It is a contest between 'what is' and 'what ought to be', between practice and theory. That is much more than a simple philosophical debate. In fact, behind it lies a much more profound confrontation of the relative priorities that we will give to history over consciousness or vice versa: does the way we think about the world determine how we shape it, such that our ideas configure historical realities, or do the world's historical forces configure our consciousness, such that we 'reflect' that world and internalize its actualities as a norm of thought? It asks the fundamental question, therefore, concerning the relation of the university as a privileged site of thought to the world in which it finds itself; and it therefore places the student at the central axis of our contemporary turbulence.

In the face of this, in some cases, we have seen students joining with the general aims of the Occupy movement, temporarily occupying university buildings or spaces and 'reclaiming' those spaces in order to return them to their proper use, as a site for debate, criticism and dissent. On this view, the university and the ideas that emanate from dissenting debate can help shape history. Others, by contrast, have sought more immediate and direct action, prioritizing material realities in an effort to change or reconfigure the ideas and ideals around which a society – and its universities, its 'life of the mind' – might organize itself. These latter have started coming out of the libraries and labora-tories and on to the streets to join with concerned citizens where, sometimes, they find their right to walk in protest through the streets impeded, and find the full material force of the state, as they are 'kettled' by police forces or are met with other forms of violence. We have seen this struggle for priorities enacted in numerous different jurisdictions. Chile, Québec, Spain and the United Kingdom are the places where the protests and the associated movements have perhaps been most visible; but the International Student Movement details such actions worldwide.[2]

What is it that has so disturbed the *Groves of Academe* about which Mary McCarthy wrote in her campus novel of that title in the United States in 1951? Why might students and scholars feel 'embattled'? What is the nature of the war or struggles at issue, and if there is indeed a war, what is at stake in it? To borrow from the subtitle of *The Rights of Man* by H.G. Wells in 1940, just after the breakout of the Second World War, 'what are we fighting for?' When McCarthy borrowed her novel's title from Horace's *Epistles*, there was a prevalent view of the University as an institution where, indeed, one would set about trying to 'search for truths in the groves of academe', and one would do this by a quiet

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[2] See, for instance, http://www.emancipating-education-for-all.org.

and meditative attempt to 'distinguish crooked from straight'. The presiding image of the institution, across the developed world of the early 1950s or post-Second World War years, was one where the academy was like a sequestered area in which one could pursue, in a bucolic and undisturbed fashion, the 'life of the mind', untroubled and untrammelled by the cares of the world, fulfilling at last the 19th-century Arnoldian promise that we should find the 'best that has been thought and said' in a supposedly entirely 'disinterested' manner.

This presiding image, of course, was always a myth, and indeed, one of the reasons why the 'campus novel' started to appear as a separate genre in this period, relates precisely to the fact that the institutions, post-Second World War, started to undergo changes to debunk that myth. Such changes, them-selves, to some extent, were actually conditioned by war and its socio-cultural aftermath, when the violence of history had disturbed any myth of a culture at peace and intellectual ease with itself. This is perhaps most clear, for a specific example, in the passing of the US GI Bill, or 'Servicemen's Readjustment Act', passed in 1944, which helped finance a tertiary education for American vet-erans returning from the Second World War. Similar provisions for discharged military service personnel were also enacted elsewhere, and the result is a sig-nificant change in the constituency of students now attending universities. This new constituency, further, had been as far removed from a bucolic grove as one could imagine, struggling for basic physical survival in the various terrifying theatres of war all across the world. The consequence of this is a tension – within the university institution itself – between the 'life of the mind' detached from worldly care on the one hand and 'survival of the body' threatened by the environment on the other hand.

In the United Kingdom, there had been similar changes previously, in the wake of the Great War of 1914–1918. Those years saw a series of significant changes domestically, especially in relation to the enhanced socio-political visibility – the material realities – of women as they started to gain the franchise. That struggle for state recognition, of course, was not just grounded in intellec-tual argument: the suffragettes had recourse to direct and violent action; by the end of the Great War in 1918, the movement could no longer be resisted. The first woman to be elected to the House of Commons in Westminster was Con-stance Markiewicz, of Sinn Féin, in December 1918. As a representative of Sinn Féin, however, she refused to take her seat in the Westminster government, for she was engaged in a further violent political struggle – a war, in fact – for Irish independence. Consequently, she took her seat instead – alongside some 73 other elected Sinn Féin candidates – as a representative in the newly formed *Dáil Éireann*, claiming independent self-government for the Republic of Ireland. Struggles in war and over gender coalesce in terms of the social and political

franchise: women have the right to speak, to vote and to establish their cultural and political authority; but this arises here precisely in the context of warfare.

Hitherto, such authority had been the province of men only, and especially in relation to the UK government, it had been the province of men who not only inherited land, wealth and forms of cultural or official 'entitlement', but also became members of an 'establishment' through their university degrees and the networks that they had established in Oxbridge. War was putting this kind of unquestioned entitlement under severe pressure and scrutiny (though the establishment fought back vigorously). In 1919, for example, the United Kingdom's 'Sex Disqualification Removal Act' opened numerous professions to women for the first time. War – together with a female workforce that had found their social voice more audibly when men were away at the front – had shifted society from its usual bearings and previous norms. Further, soon after this, women were allowed not only to attend university but also to proceed to take their degrees formally. This also significantly changed the university, bringing new constituencies into daily contact with each other, and doing so under the aegis of political struggles and international war.

Class also started to play a major role in this series of social changes occasioned by war, and one place where class would make its presence felt most directly was education. In 1918, Herbert Fisher, the Liberal President of the Board of Education in David Lloyd George's wartime government, proposed a new Education Act. The Education Act of 1918 not only raised the school-leaving age to 14, but also envisaged a growth in the tertiary sector. Paragraph 3:2 of Chapter 39 is explicit in requiring the 'cooperation of universities' in providing a higher education for any student for whom it would be appropriate. In this, the Fisher Act of 1918 is a clear forerunner and harbinger of the better-known Robbins Report of 1963, which asserted that university places should be available to all and to those who had shown that they could benefit from it or who were qualified 'by ability and attainment'.

Fisher's Act was followed in 1919 with the formal establishment of the University Grants Committee. This Committee did two very significant new things. First, it helped to establish, for the first time, a self-consciously national state-funded university system in the United Kingdom. The state demonstrated a fundamental financial commitment and declared an interest, an interest on behalf of the general population as a national whole. Second, it helped secure more sustainable state funding for the existing institutions (Oxbridge, London, some late 19th-century institutions) that had been damaged or substantially under-funded as a result of the war effort.

During the war years, research funding provided to the universities had not only been significantly reduced but had also been instrumentalized and