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Welcome to **ATTACK!** a two-page occasional publication. Most of **ATTACK!** will be concerned with the holistic curriculum which, if acted on, is a fundamental way to undermine the present undemocratic education system. Don't be discouraged if opportunities to teach holistically are limited, do your best, be a guardian, and act as a witness to this culturally significant and inspiring way of teaching and learning. **ATTACK!** is a partner to <https://networkonnet.wordpress.com>

Attack! 40 Professors Part 1

The scene used below is from James Joyce's Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man. It is an inspired piece of writing in which a Jesuit director uses the blandishments of religious power to try to entice the Stephen Dedalus to the Jesuit life. I have taken the liberty to change the situation to that of a university professor using the blandishments of academic power. A powerful symbolism throughout the writing is the way Joyce plays with light: light being blocked from the window, the control of light through manipulation of the blindcords, the playing of shadows, and the waning light of the long summer's day.

Portrait of a professor ...

The psychology (education) professor stood in the embrasure of the window, his back to the light, leaning on an elbow on the brown crossblind, and, as he spoke and smiled, slowly dangling and looping the cord of the other blind. The young man stood before him, following for a moment with his eyes the waning of the long summer daylight above the roofs or the slow deft movement of the professorial fingers. The professor's face was in total shadow but the waning daylight from behind him touched the temples and the curve of the skull.

The young man followed also with his ears the accents and intervals of the professor's voice as he spoke gravely and cordially of indifferent themes, the holidays which had just ended, overseas conferences, changes in faculty personnel. The grave and cordial voice went on easily with its tale and in the pauses the young man felt bound to set it on again with respectful questions. He knew that the tale was a prelude and his mind waited for the sequel.

Ever since the message of summons had come for him from the professor his mind had struggled to find the meaning; and, during the long restless time he had sat in the office waiting for the professor to come in, his eyes had wandered from one sober picture to another round the walls and his mind wandered from one guess to another until the meaning of the summons had almost become clear. Then, just as he was wishing that some unforeseen cause might prevent the professor from coming, he had heard the handle of the door turning.

The professor had begun to speak of the various differentiations in his field of psychology, then moving to the community of interest between them.

The matters were prosaic.

A question was asked, but of little moment.

The young man's face gave back the professor's indulgent smile and, not being anxious to give an opinion, he made a slight dubitative movement with his lips.

The professor continued.

The young man smiled again in answer to the smile which he could not see on the professor's shadowed face, its image or spectre only passing rapidly across his mind. He gazed calmly before him at the waning sky, glad of the cool of the evening, and the faint yellow glow which hid the tiny flame kindling on his cheek.

Then the professor said something that made him start.

The phrase on the professor's lips was disingenuous for he knew that he would not have spoken loosely on such a theme. The phrase had been spoken lightly with design and he felt his face was being searched by



the eyes in the shadow. During all his years with the professor, and professors like him, he had never heard a flippant word. Lately, though, some of their judgements had sounded a little childish in his ears and made him feel regret and pity as though he were slowly passing out of an accustomed world and were hearing its language for the last time.

The tiny flame which the professor's allusion had kindled upon the young man's cheek had sunk down again and his eyes were still fixed calmly on the colourless sky. But an unresting doubt flew hither and thither. The echoes of certain expressions used by the professor sounded in the remote caves of his mind. His ears were listening to those distant echoes amid the silence of the room when he became aware that the professor was addressing him in a different voice.

- I sent for you because I wished to speak to you on a very important subject.

- Have you ever felt that you had a special vocation?

The young man parted his lips to answer yes then withheld the word suddenly. The professor waited for an answer and added:

- I mean, have you ever felt within yourself, a desire to join the profession of which I am a member? Think.

I have sometimes thought of it, ventured the young man.

The professor let the blindcord fall to one side and, uniting his hands, leaned his chin gravely upon them, communing with himself.

- In a department like mine, he said at length, there is one student or perhaps two or three who have the attributes for the calling. Such a student is marked off from his companions by his intelligence and tenacity, by the good example he shows to others. He is looked up to by them. And you have been such a student in this department. Perhaps you are the student with such a calling.

A strong note of pride reinforcing the gravity of the professor's voice made the young man's heart quicken in response. To receive that call, eventually to become a professor of a department such as this is a great honour, the greatest academic honour. The power you have, as a result of your position, will be immense: the power to proclaim your ideas and have them listened to; the power to have your ideas affect the affairs of society. You will, if you do things the right way, be in the company of the great and the powerful. You will be on many boards, councils, and consultative groups. And when you do something for the public good, garner tributes for what you have done. By your very support what might have been dismissed for any number of reasons, will command attention as significant. What an awful power: the power to issue ideas with the authority of being derived from research, the latest research, and all the more powerful for being psychologically anointed.

A flame began to flutter again in the young man's cheek as he heard in this proud address an echo of his own proud musings. How often had he seen himself as an academic icon wielding calmly the power of those who know – those who know from their special insight? His very being had loved to muse in secret on this desire. He had seen himself ascending to the lectern, sought by the media, carrying out the acts of a high academia. In that dim life which he had lived through in his musings he had assumed the voices and gestures he had noted of his professors, especially this professor.

But then, he had, in his musings, shrunk from the grandiose. It had pleased him more to fill the second place in those dim scenes of his imagination. He moved to a longing for a minor role; to stand aloof from the formalities that ended in the person of a high academic. What he seemed to want to do was not talk over the heads of people to the powerful but to stand aside with the people, talking quietly when he adjudged he had something of value to say.

He listened in careful silence to the professor's appeal and through the words he heard even more distinctly a voice bidding him approach, offering him secret knowledge and secret power. He would know obscure things, hidden from others. He would command a special language which would protect and enhance his position, and set him aside from the ordinary forever.

- I will speak to the others about you. But you must be quite sure. It is before you must weigh well, not after.

He held open the heavy door and gave his hand to the young man as if already to a companion in the academic life. The young man looked out the corridor window and imagined the caress of the mild evening air. A quartet of young men were striding along with linked arms. He heard music from somewhere; it passed in an instant, as the first bars of sudden music always did, over the fantastic fabrics of his mind, dissolving them painlessly and noiselessly as a sudden wave dissolves the sand-built turrets of children. Smiling at the trivial air he raised his eyes to the professor's face and, seeing in it a mirthless reflection of the sunken day, detached his hand slowly which had acquiesced faintly in that companionship.

Continued in Part 2



