

Professor Hmnnn

A DAY IN THE LIFE

By John M. Robson

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It has recently become apparent that students don't know very much about their professors. To help dispel the mystery, we offer the following factual account of how one professor spends his time.

Professor Hmnnn lectures in one of the Federated Colleges in the University of Toronto. He holds a B.A. degree from a maritime university, an M.A. from a western university, and a Ph.D. from an ivy-league university. He is forty-two years old, has a wife and five children, lives in the suburbs, and is distinguished by a pleasantly vague and disconcerted look in the winters and a pleasantly disconcerted and vague look in the summers. He loves his work, and labours mightily at it.

Here is his story.

- 5.43-6.30 a.m. Baby cries.
- 6.30-7.15 Wife cries.
- 7.16 Doorbell rings and professor rushes down to answer it: garbage collector wants to know if he is supposed to pick up the rubbish that's strewn over the front lawn as a result of the local dogs' long night's work. Professor cheerfully picks it up, pats three dogs on the head, and offers the garbage man a small bribe if he doesn't report him to the authorities.
- 7.27 Enters house, calls "Good morning" to wife, who begins to cry again.
- 7.28-45 Blasts, shakes, and roars a little haste into his three school-age children, while wife attends to the preschoolers.
- 7.45-8.30 Chaos come again, during which certain ablutions, evacuations, and feedings occur. Professor takes a major part in these operations, cultivating his tranquillity on a little oatmeal.
- 8.30-35 Keeps up with current events by a careful reading of the morning paper.
- 8.35-9.20 Takes twenty-minute drive down the expressway to the city. During the trip thinks happy thoughts about metro planners.
- 9.20-30 Walks from car to office, passing through small groups of students who are waiting for other professors who have twenty-five minute drives; the students quietly applaud the great man who, in concentrating on higher things, has put on his wife's pants suit.
- 9.30-31 Consults with three students who are camped outside his door, where they've been waiting for four days to see him. Advises them to come back later.
- 9.31-50 Goes through his mail. The first six envelopes contain publishers' brochures (two of them elegant publishers' brochures), suggesting, among other things, that there's just time for him to adopt as a text Guggle and Wink, *Advanced Composition and Decomposition for Freshman* (it won't be published until 1970, but there's a special pre-publication price). Glancing at the first two, he throws the rest without opening them into the waste-paper basket, feeling guilty the while because Guggle is an old friend of his, who has spent six years, including a sabbatical leave, stealing excerpts from other texts to make up this one.
- (9.35-36 Picks up envelopes from the floor and puts them safely in the waste-paper basket, which has again been moved by the janitor from its logical position.) In a heap of unanswered mail he piles the other letters: two of them are requested for letters of recommendation which must be written within a day to meet deadlines, but since he can't remember who the students are, and since he has a press of other work, they won't be written for two weeks. One is a letter from the *Canadian Intelligentsia* (a little magazine asking if the review he



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promised to write has gone astray - it hasn't gone anywhere. One is a report from his publisher saying that his book on linguistic habits in Don Mills has sold twenty-seven copies in the last year, and enclosing a royalty cheque for \$3.52. Finally there is a note from one of the students outside the door, asking him please to open it. During this time the phone has rung seven times: four wrong numbers, once the Chairman of the Committee on Committees reminding him that there will be a meeting at 2.00 p.m., and once his wife reminding him to buy an electric mixer, a washing machine, a dozen 60-watt bulbs, and two candles in case the power fails. The final call is from one of the students outside the door who has brought along a portable phone, asking him please to open the door.

9.15-55 Looks for notes for lecture at 10.10. Can't find them, so phones wife in panic to see if they're at home. (What good it would do him to find that they are at home he doesn't know.) Wife, holding baby in one hand and bag of loose garbage in the other, also panics: she locates a pile of academic-looking papers, puts them in the high-chair, baby in garbage can, and sorts through the garbage looking for the notes. Meanwhile, back at the office, the notes have appeared from the place where they were last put two years ago. (Last year, he thinks, somebody else gave the course.) He shouts into the phone: "It's all right dear!" just as his wife puts it to her ear (the one that isn't full of pabulum from baby's exertions); deafened and garbaged, she says she can't seem to put her hands on anything relevant. Finally he gets the happy message through, and hangs up just as she tells him not to forget to buy a new furnace.

9.56-10.01. Carefully, slowly, perceptively, brilliantly, he goes through the lecture notes, deleting an outmoded comment here, adding a new fact there. Some points seem obscure, but he knows that all will be clear once he begins to talk aloud; next year, however, these notes *must* be given a dusting off. Realizing that he's read all this sometime

before, he doesn't panic again. Instead he takes a tranquillizer, and decides he has just time for a cup of coffee and in the staff room outside his door.

10.02-3 Fights his way through the students (there are at least ten of them now), muttering: "Come back later."

10.04-13. Pours and drinks cup of coffee, while asking a colleague for advice about buying electric mixers. Colleague reaches for his pile of academic texts, selects Veblen's *The Theory of Leisure Class*, and slips off the dustjacket to reveal a copy of Consumer's Guide. He says the evidence is inconclusive, but interesting, and they should look at it carefully some time.

10.14-15. Strides purposefully through the halls to lecture room, enters and mounts podium. He's five minutes late for his 10.10 lecture - but he's still ahead of some of the students, who have had a twenty-minute hike through halls, down stairs, across Honda-filled bypaths and fastback-filled highpaths, up stairs and through halls.

10.15-17. Clears his throat, tries to look annoyed, clears his throat, looks aghast (from the other side he looks ghastly), clears his throat, begins to mutter under his breath. The eager students in front row, thinking they're missing something (they are), clear their throats, try to look annoyed, and finally shout, in well-modulated and cultured voices: "Put a can on it!" "Sharropp you creeps!" And most impressively, "Shhh. He's trying to say something." The shouts bring derisory shouts in reply, but the hubbub finally lessens.

10.18-11.00. Delivers outstanding lecture, persuasive, commanding, authoritative, interrupting the hypnotic flow only twice, once to throw a piece of chalk at a student who has disturbed the mood by snoring, and once to hurl a brilliant piece of invective at two students who are softly giggling over the *The Realist*. Finishes briskly with a comment which he hopes will disguise the fact that he has delivered next-week's lecture by mistake.

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