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Professional Double: Or, The Twin Peaks of Professor Z's Career

Robert E. Rains

Just what is it professors do?
My students often ask.
How do they fill their waking days?
It is an awesome task.

We teach a course or two each term,
And meet with student fans,
Committees must commit, of course,
On sundry brilliant plans.

And twice a year, the worst of all:
Recycle old exams,
So teaching fellows can discern
How well each student crams.

No doubt, one breaks a sweat as one
Jogs up that tenure track,
With multiplying footnotes, thus
To prove one has the knack.

But after one has made the grade,
With tenure been anointed,
And to the gates and fences task force
One has been appointed,

It all becomes so much less clear
How one should spend one's time,
That we ourselves may wonder
Why it is alarm clocks chime.

But even more confusing than
How pedants fill the slack,
Is what it is they oughtn't do
So's not to get the sack.

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Robert E. Rains is Professor at the Dickinson School of Law. The author gratefully acknowledges his indebtedness to Jacob Neusner, University of South Florida, for bringing to his attention the implications of the Hamlet-like tragedy of Professor Z, who taught not too poorly, but too much. *What It Takes for Professors to Get Themselves Fired*, *Chron. Higher Educ.*, Mar. 17, 1993, at A52.

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We mustn't mess with students' hearts,
Nor parts of their anatomy;
This is a rule that's never breached
(I'm told) in the academy.

And I suppose one shouldn't steal,
Nor rape, nor sack, nor pillage;
But otherwise one keeps one's place
Within the learned village.

It's pretty easy pickin's here
For those with half a brain,
But maybe some are just too smart,
And sloth drives them insane.

And so indeed Professor Z,
Who taught at Minnesota,
Decided that his duties there
Stretched him not one iota.

He found a job at U.N.C.
But kept his northern teaching.
He jetted back and forth to work,
His classes always reaching.

He taught quite well, and no one knew
For quite a little while.
He went to meetings, did research,
And pulled it off with style.

But questions rose about—not work—
But where he kept his kin;
And when the truth at last came out,
Duplicity did him in.

* * * * *

The lesson of the story: If
From school you'd not be barred,
Remember, young professor, don't
You ever work too hard.

But more than that—and just the thought
Of it leaves strong men queasy—
Whatever else you do, don't make
Our jobs appear too easy.

And yet, my hat is off to Z
And his ingenious plan.
He stretched to outer limits the
Duality of man.