

**The Rime of the College English Prof**  
**(In three parts)**

---

Rafeeq O. McGiveron

I

It is a college English Prof,  
And he stoppeth one of three.  
"By thy unshaved beard and red-rimmed eye,  
Now wherefore stoppest thou me?"

"The meeting's doors are opened wide,  
And I must needs go in;  
Faculty's met, the agenda set:  
May'st hear the tedious din."

He holds him with his trembling hand,  
"There was a class," quoth he.  
"Nay, if thou'st got a laughsome tale,  
English Prof, come with me."

He holds him with his red-rimmed eye –  
That Faculty stands still,  
And listens like a truant child:  
The English Prof hath his will.

That Faculty sits on a chair:  
He cannot turn or scoff;  
And thus raves on that wild-eyed man,  
The College English Prof.

"With syllabus writ, the students sit;  
Warily we begin  
To talk of life and literature  
And how we all fit in.

"The clock-hand came up on the left,  
Out of the left came he!  
And down he went upon the right,  
Down till quarter past three.

"Listen, Stranger! Papers came,  
Clichéd, with glib talk strong!  
Four days a week I felt a geek:  
I knew something was wrong.

"Listen, Stranger! Plagiarism  
Of ideas stale and cold.  
They parroted thoughts not their own  
Though sliméd o'er with mold.

"Cheap talk was here, cheap talk was there,  
Cheap talk was all around:  
We lacked interpretation;  
Mere description did abound."

"God save thee, College English Prof!  
From the fiends that plague thee thus!  
Why look'st thou so?" – "I banned Cliff's Notes,  
Which made their papers go.

II

"The clock-hand came down on the right,  
Down on the right came he;  
Grimmer and grimmer every day  
Down till quarter past three.

"Literature still drove us on,  
But few good words did follow,  
Nor any day yet would they say  
Ideas that were not hollow.

"Though I had done the natural thing,  
They thought it worked 'em woe:  
For all averred I had killed the Word  
That made their papers flow.

"Down dropt their brows; they grew so rude,  
Were rude as they could be,  
And then they spake only to break  
The silence, and curse me.

"All in a hot and futile daze  
My tired frame at noon  
Before that 'parently thoughtless class  
Stood as in a swoon.

"Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, with little motion –  
Not any student dared to voice  
One original notion.

"Some looked at me and tried to say  
But before the words had gushed,  
A jealous whisper came, and made  
Their mouths as dry as dust.

"Then I saw a gleam in a student's eye;  
She spoke and took the risk.  
Slowly others thought, and then  
Discussion grew quite brisk.

"Notions, notions everywhere –  
No more'd their papers stink.  
Int'rested voices everywhere  
Proved that they could think.

### III

"O Faculty! This prof hath been  
Alone 'fore a sullen class:  
So lonely 'twas, for thoughts expressed  
Scarce seemed more than crass.

"O sweeter that the sham Cliff's Notes,  
'Tis sweeter far to me,  
To sit together in a class  
With a thoughtful company! –

"To sit together in a class  
And 'mongst ourselves converse,  
To lecture less, and encourage thought  
On fiction, drama, verse.

"Farewell, farewell! But this I tell  
To thee, thou Faculty!  
He teacheth well who asketh well  
For thoughts original.

"He teacheth best, who doth demand  
Deep thoughts both great and small;  
For students can enjoy and write  
'Bout any lit at all."

The English Prof, whose eye's red-rimmed,  
Whose unshaved beard is hoar,  
Is gone: and now the Faculty  
Turned from the meeting's door.

He went like one that has been stunned,  
And is of pretense shorn:  
A wiser, more demanding prof  
He taught the morrow morn.

*Rafeeq O. McGiveron has taught English and World Civilization in the Humanities and Performing Arts Department at Lansing Community College since 1992. His parody-poetry has appeared in The MacGuffin, his criticism in Science-Fiction Studies.*