

THE ENGLISH PROF 101

Or: The Mike Shea Ditty

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“Little darling, it feels like years since it’s been here
Here comes the sun
Here comes the sun, and I say
It’s all right”

The Beatles: “Here Comes the Sun”; Abbey Road (opening song, side 2)

Mike was a real good teacher. He taught us things that was real good, like where to put periods and all, even commas to. And stuff like don’t end sentences with a proposal. Then he got a bit fancy and talked and talked and talked about like, sin tax and cymbals and stuff. He talked a lot. He walked around a lot too and mostly talked to the cute girls, which sucked because he could get all the girls since he had a car. His car was kewl, I think it was a bug. But there were a hole in the floor and you’re feet wood hit the street because it was rusted. He was cheap too, there was never no heat in the bug. And he was really old, like maybe 25. But sometimes he was OK, like the time we skipped class and went to listen to a record about some monk’s street or something by a band I think it was called a beatle or something I guess you could say Mike liked bugs a lot.

“You used to be so amused
At Napoleon in rags and the language that he used
Go to him now, he calls you, you can’t refuse
When you got nothing, you got nothing to lose
You’re invincible now, you got no secrets to reveal”

B. Dylan: “Like a Rolling Stone”; Highway 61 Revisited

That flip flop mop hairdo punk in ripped Levi’s and black high top Chuck Taylor’s- that’s our prof? Who does he think he is with those tortoise shell specs that won’t become fashionable for another 30 years? He drops a “D minus” on my first paper ‘cause my punctuation is weak. Let’s see if I could quote his raggedy ass: “...a chain is only as strong as its weakest link...”. I wonder how many times he’s used that line on unsuspecting English freshman from upstanding schools where their lowest grade was a “B” and that mostly due to hangovers after a long night of weed and PBRs (which in 1979, was not in vogue but rather just a broke guys’ beer). But, damn, he is right.

The real question is, can you trust a guy barely older than you that’s going to teach you the dreaded English 101- even as he looks and walks and talks like the illegitimate gay love-child of Bob Dylan and Woody Allen?

It’s a trap- the torn Clash tee shirt must be a ruse: he speaks of Shakespeare, then film and rock and roll and understands it all. Maybe he is cool and can relate...then he drops another “C+” on me and I realize that no, he is just a prick. But a good hearted soul with a smile that cuts you like a knife.

“And when the heat came down it was left on the ground
The devil appeared like Jesus through the steam in the streets
Showin’ me a hand I knew even the cops couldn’t beat
I felt his hot breath on my neck as I dove into the heat
It’s so hard to be a saint when you’re just a boy out on the street”
B. Springsteen: “It’s Hard to be a Saint in the City”; Greetings from Asbury
Park

Well the heat did come down that semester and I needed a break, so I visited my Annie Hall- loving East coast intellectual liberal professor. Can a guy steal some compassion from Mike Shea, the low-grader? As you may now suspect- he was real, he was fair, and he saved my school record. My eyes wide open now, there is not only empathy, but love and respect in both directions.

Plot. Theme. Symbolism. Irony. Metaphor. Allusion. Tone. Composition (Abbey Road!): All important to the beautiful English language that he so tenderly taught and guided through our young minds. But there is more, there is always more from Mike. His love and compassion and laughter- and yes, his toughness- molded those that accepted his direction through our turbulent young days to learn and love the structure, sound, and sense that he adores.

“Her majesty’s a pretty nice girl
Someday I’m gonna make her mine, oh yea,
Some day I’m gonna make her mine”
The Beatles: “Her Majesty”; Abbey Road (closing song, side 2)

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