

Mika (Je Hoon) Lee

Writing 5

Professor Wendy Piper

November 2nd, 2016

The Realization of a Bright Soul

In "The Dark Night of the Soul," Richard E. Miller introduces four authors, Martin Amis, Jon Krakauer, Rene Descartes, and Mary Karr, to examine the different ways individuals internalize the activities of reading and writing, and concludes that the relevance of literate arts in present day is dwindling. He questions the value of literate arts as he asks in his essay, "What might the literate arts be said to be good for?" (424). I believe Miller should not be doubtful about the importance of literate arts because the rise of technology can further their ability. Technology is shaping literate arts into new forms: films, websites and video games are such examples. In my life, the television show *iCarly*, which I watched through the Internet, has been a major literate art. A television show is an important literate art because its message often inspires its viewers to emulate its hero's contribution to the society. *iCarly* imbued me with a desire to be as ambitious in pursuing my interests as the main characters in the show were. It inspired me to create an online medium through which I can share my passion with others. For the three main characters in *iCarly*, that passion was producing and hosting a talent show. For me, it was learning economics.

iCarly is the story of three middle school students Carly, Sam and Freddy, who create a webcast that eventually becomes an online sensation. Carly and Sam first discover their passion in hosting a show when they emcee their school's talent show. They become immensely

popular among their friends, and with the help of Freddy, Carly and Sam decide to share their interest with people outside their school. As a result, the three characters host a weekly talent show featuring activities like cooking, dancing and singing, and then upload it online. While overcoming challenges that come with adolescence, Carly, Sam and Freddy become successful video hosts and producers, winning multiple international accolades.

Like Carly, Sam and Freddy, I too had an interest that I wanted to share. In middle school, I came across economics and became engrossed in it. It was unusual for a fourteen-year old to eagerly learn a college-level subject but I spent everyday reading anything related to economics to gain deeper insight into it. I had opinions on economics issues and policy recommendations that I wanted people to listen to and read about. Unfortunately I was too young to take any economics courses, so it was very difficult for me to interact with my fellow economics enthusiasts at school. I then thought back to *iCarly*, where the three characters took their own initiative to share their passion with others. The show taught me that it was worth creating your own opportunity to dig deeper into your interest despite the adversities you might confront. It was “cool” to have people learn about your enthusiasm for a particular activity. I tried to emulate Carly and her friends’ achievements, so I created an online blog called, “Mikanomics,” to disseminate my economics knowledge and thoughts while facilitating discourse.

In one of the sections of “The Dark Night of the Soul,” Miller analyzes the effect of books on Chris McCandless. This section is titled, “Following the Word,” which is fitting given that McCandless literally tried to live the life that was depicted by the books he read. A tale that particularly had a powerful impact on McCandless was Jack London’s *Call of the Wild*. He was so

enthralled by this story, which was about life in Alaska, that he embarked on a solo adventure through the Alaskan wilderness. However, McCandless' spiritual quest ended up turning into a misadventure when he was found dead two years later deep in the Alaskan wilds. Miller views individuals like McCandless as "real readers who invest the activities of reading and writing with great significance" (428). In this aspect, McCandless and I are alike because we both took our literate art seriously. Like McCandless and his books, I was fascinated by the literate art that was most prominent in my life, *iCarly*, and applied its theme to my life. However, what separates me from McCandless is what Miller calls, "critical optimism" — I was realistic and critical about the limits of the world, yet I was optimistic that I could still achieve something within those limits. Creating an online blog to share information with others was a feasible action. On the other hand, McCandless' dangerous quest was not. He placed too much faith in London's novel: he constructed his imagination with London's romantic view of life in the Alaskan wilderness rather than its actuality. Literate arts might not be good for active readers who lack critical optimism such as McCandless. However, not everyone internalizes the activities of reading and writing like McCandless. *iCarly's* influence on the creation of my economics blog Mikanomics is a testament to the positive impact a literate art can have on active readers with critical optimism.

In another section in "The Dark Night of the Soul," Miller writes about Martin Amis' uncertainty about the merits of reading and writing, which is revealed in Amis' book *The Information*. Amis displays a pessimistic attitude towards the growth in our society's understanding of the universe. An important message that Amis conveys through his book is that "the information that comes with age, the information that comes at night, brings news of

futility, ignorance, insignificance, humiliation” (427). During Miller’s analysis of Amis, Miller also claims that we currently live in the “Information Age,” but nothing we do or will do in the Information Age will have any lasting significance. Miller’s assertion reminds readers of Amis’ belief that “knowledge of the size of the cosmos robs the activities of reading and writing of any lasting meaning” (428). However, I am not so critical of the Information Age as Miller and Amis are. What Amis calls, “knowledge of the size of the cosmos” has led to technological innovations, which have in turn made greater access to information possible. The widespread availability of information will not detract from its influence. I watched *iCarly*, a teen sitcom produced in the United States, through the Internet from the other side of the world. The show, a product in the Information Age, undoubtedly had a lasting impact on me, as it inspired me to read and write about economics outside of school. Mikanomics, which was also created in the Information Age with the help of technological innovations, asks its audience to read its posts and write something in response to them. Thus, neither Mikanomics nor *iCarly* has “[robbed] the activities of reading and writing of any lasting meaning,” (428) as Amis suggests because these two literate arts have only encouraged reading and writing. Just like how *iCarly* has positively influenced me, Mikanomics might end up becoming an important literate art for its audience members by motivating them to pursue the study of economics more intensely. This is possible because the Internet has allowed Mikanomics to reach more than forty thousand unique viewers from four different continents.

One of the reasons I am taking this course is that I am very interested in educational policy. As a result, when I read and wrote about Paulo Freire, Mary Louise Pratt, Richard Rodriguez and most recently Richard Miller, I asked myself questions about how I could learn

from their ideas and experiences and enact positive change in the classroom. My interaction with Miller allowed me to understand that the pace at which the world is transforming is rapidly breaking our traditional conception of education. The activities of reading and writing, our access to literate arts, the shape that literate arts are taking are all constantly evolving. In the introduction of "The Dark Night of the Soul," Miller says that this essay speaks for people who have "recognized...that the rise of technology and the emergence of the globalized economy have diminished the academy's cultural significance" (423). My reflection of *iCarly* has led me to believe that literate arts can be presented through technology. In addition, as *iCarly* and *Mikanomics* have demonstrated, just because something is technological does not mean it has to hinder someone from reading and writing. The value of literate arts has certainly not diminished. Literacy workers will realize how bright, not dark, their soul is once they learn that ever-advancing technologies could further the ability of literate arts.

Works Cited

Miller, Richard E. "The Dark Night of the Soul." *Ways of Reading*. Ed. David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky. Ninth Ed. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2011. 420-442. Print