2014

Little Red Herrings: Far From the Maddening Crowds

Mark Y. Herring
Winthrop University, herringm@winthrop.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation
Herring, Mark Y. (2014) "Little Red Herrings: Far From the Maddening Crowds," Against the Grain: Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 32.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6675

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.
Little Red Herrings — Far From the Maddening [sic] Crowds

by Mark Y. Herring  (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herrimgm@winthrop.edu>

W e live in an age of chattering masses, a phrase not to be confused with “the chattering classes.” The latter were eggheads, soi-disant intellectuals, or tweed-coated academics who readily opined on any topic, some of whom actually knew what they were talking about. The chattering classes essentially talked to each other, noses firmly in the air at times, so the rest of us hoi-polloi might learn something. It was a phrase for an elitist age, and it did not sit well as we began to let it all hang out.

Today, however, we have thrown out the chattering classes for the chattering masses. In our hyper-connected age, everybody talks to everybody else, with all sorts of entertaining news from the burned toast, to the failed romance, to that meatloaf-did-not-sit-well-last-night-#-explosion. And speaking of explosions, we “blow up” the Twitterverse with our claptrap that masquerades as real conversations and human connections. Essentially we are all talking to ourselves because no one is really listening.

The delight in all this is it’s instantaneous! I italicize the word because that lends both credibility and celerity to it. It’s another way of saying there is no time for reflection, no time for second thoughts (those are shared of saying there is no time for reflection, no time to chatter, and not shut up for even a second. They ruin movies, people’s lives, restaurants, appliances, books, enterprises large and small, and for what? For no other reason than they want to see their ALL CAPS IN PRINT. For this we are giving up newspapers, personal communications, books, libraries, and Lord only knows what else!?

Europeans have long thought of Americans as shallow, frivolous, and a bit too silly. We complain that they are staid and too “uptight.” But are we a bit too superficial for our own good?

Are our own technology, our tweets, and our posts proving their criticisms in spades? 😅

Booklover — Gross National Happiness

Column Editor: Donna Jacobs  (Retired, Medical University of South Carolina, Charleston, SC 29425) <donna.jacobs55@gmail.com>

I s there such a thing as too much happiness? This question can open a never-ending philosophical discussion. When the Canadian author Alice Munro won the 2013 Nobel Prize for Literature in the fall, the question was brought to mind again. The numerous press releases announcing her award mentioned the 2009 collection of short stories entitled “Too Much Happiness.” It was time again to check out a book. I read the book on my Kindle, checked out from the Charleston County Library, processed through my account at Amazon — this makes me happy.

If you are a follower of this column you are aware that I don’t review books — I connect them to life. This new book and author were presenting a challenge until I expressed my dilemma early one morning to my running buddy. She responded with “Have you ever heard of the concept of ‘Gross National Happiness’?” to which I responded “No.” A quick education, and I had the connection I needed to write.

In the over 100 page document “A Short Guide to Gross National Happiness Index” written by Karma Ura, Sabina Alkire, Tshoki Zangmo, and Karma Wandri of The Center for Bhutan Studies, I learn: “In the GNH Index, unlike certain concepts of happiness in current western literature, happiness is itself multidimensional — not measured only by subjective well-being, and not focused narrowly on happiness that begins and ends with oneself and is concerned for and with oneself. The pursuit of happiness is collective, though it can be experienced deeply personally. Different people can be happy in spite of their disparate circumstances and the options for diversity must be wide.” …“The GNH Index provides an overview of performance across 9 domains of GNH (psychological wellbeing, time use, communication, …

continued on page 51