

Literature and Economics

“We try to take our minds off the lackluster food with conversation. Now that I think about it, perhaps that is why the Greeks were so eloquent – it was a coping mechanism, something to take their minds off the god awful food. As I pick at my salad, I wonder, if ancient Greek cuisine had been better, maybe they wouldn’t have invented democracy or philosophy or any other their other accomplishments?”

“It’s not as far-fetched as it sounds. We only have so much creative energy; we can channel it into philosophy or soufflés, sculpture or truffles.”

***The Geography of Genius* by Eric Weiner, page 47**

“Thirty minutes later, he walked out of the office with a job. Most of the jobs remaining at the dam sight, he had been told, were for common laborers, paying fifty cents an hour. But studying the application form, Joe had noticed that there were higher pay grades for certain jobs – especially for the men whose job it was to dangle from cliff faces in harnesses and pound away at the reluctant rock with jackhammers. The jackhammer job paid seventy-five cents an hour, so Joe had put a check next to that box and stepped into the examination room for his physical.”

***The Boys in the Boat*; Daniel James Brown, page 194**

“Once upon a time the mice, being sadly distressed by the persecution of the cat, resolved to call a meeting to decide upon the best means of getting rid of their continual annoyance. Many plans were discussed and rejected. At last a young mouse got up and proposed that a bell should be hung round the cat's neck, that they might for the future always have notice of her coming, and so be able to escape. This proposition was hailed with the greatest applause, and was agreed to at once unanimously. Upon which an old mouse, who had sat silent all the while, got up and said that he considered the contrivance most ingenious and that it would, no doubt, be quite successful. But he had only one short question: ‘Who is going to bell the cat?’”

***The Mice in Council*, Aesop’s Fables**

“In Paris, alternations to building exteriors require official approval, understandably. Trouble is, the process of getting permission is a long paper trail involving numerous bureaucratic departments, public architects, every member of the building’s . . . body corporate and any neighbors who might be able to glimpse the alteration by tiptoeing on their toilet seats. Usually it arrives at a dead end. Invariably someone objects.

“Our illegal window provides an illuminating insight into the way things get done in France, revealing just how simple life can be, how limitless the possibilities, when you ignore the tangle of red tape altogether. . . . this rampant rule bending and breaking . . . can be rather efficient. It allows for a certain suppleness. *On va s’arranger*, someone will say, meaning they’re willing to strike a deal. It might not strictly speaking be one hundred percent legal but – and this is what counts – an agreement will be reached that keeps all parties happy.”

***Almost French* by Sarah Turnbull, pages 223-224**

“What’s the problem with your accommodations, Marcus?”

“In the room to which I was initially assigned . . . one of my three roommates was always playing his phonograph after I went to bed and I wasn’t able to get my night’s sleep. And I need my sleep in order to do my work. The situation was insupportable.”

“But couldn’t you sit down and work out a time for his playing the phonograph that was agreeable to the two of you?” Caudwell asked me. ‘You had to move out. There was no other choice?’”

“Yes, I had to move out.”

“No way of reaching a compromise?”

“Not with him, sir.”

***Indignation* by Philip Roth, page 88**

- A) **“Safety Gear Helps Reduce U.S. Traffic Deaths”**
B) **“Cities Target Elevated Levels of Pedestrian Deaths.”**
The Wall Street Journal (page A3), December 20, 2014

[Fox News, January 14, 2019]

Headline: “California lawmakers traveled to Hawaii with utility executives as wildfires raged.”

“A group of California lawmakers took a trip to Hawaii with utility companies last year as wildfires wreaked havoc in their state. The annual event was held in Maui in November. During the junket, representatives from utility companies discussed with lawmakers just how much responsibility they should bear for wildfires.”

In a *New York Times* story in 2012 on “The Next Big Idea” in Major League Baseball, the reporter talked about the successes of the Tampa Bay franchise, which has won without a big payroll or a new ballpark. He said that the Rays “concentrate heavily on finding advantages before they become widespread.” And he quoted their (now former) GM, Andrew Friedman: “The game is incredibly efficient right now. Our greatest fear is that it becomes perfectly efficient.”