
Book City

LA Times, April 26, 2009

I'm a reader because I grew up in Los Angeles,
most readerly city I know

A city of bookshops then,
all those sun-faded, two-tone bookmarks with no area codes:
raffish Papa Bach,
stately Hunter's,
the Duttonses, of blessed memory,

Acres of Books, a penicillin colony in every binding,
once-starry Stanley Rose,
the Crowns,
bottom-feeders, but they bought the back page every week,
righteous Midnight Special,
those mayflies, Urban Inversion and Butler Gabriel,
quixotic L.A.: The Bookstore,
and Chatterton's, prostrate at the end

But no less a city of bookstores now:
savvy Diesel,
impossible Metropolis,
Williams' of San Pedro, 100 this year,
Book Soup and Village, ineradicable,
Libreria Martinez, barbershop no more,
books and music in sublime Counterpoint,
newborn Stories of Echo Park,
and Skylight,
soul risen from Chatterton's body

All these and so many others
sanctuaries from speed
havens for mavens
like the city
clinging to a strand.

-- David Kipen, author of "The Schreiber Theory," directs the NEA's Big Read program.