

Nerding Out with Frank Mundo: Books, Essays, and Interviews

When I'm not promoting the many health benefits of preventive care and wellness visits to IEHP's 1.6 million Medicare, Medicare-Medicaid, and Covered Ca members, I love reading, discussing, reviewing, and writing books. My essays and books are taught in high schools and colleges across the country, and I often visit schools to speak to and read my work to the students.

For 20 years, I was a staff book reviewer for the San Diego Union-Tribune, the NY Journal of Books, the Swamp, Brentwood Media Group, LA Examiner, and more. In that time, I interviewed more than 100 writers. My most recent reviews/essays/interviews have been for the Los Angeles-based journal Angel City Review.



Paper Birds: Feather by Feather by Sonia Gutierrez

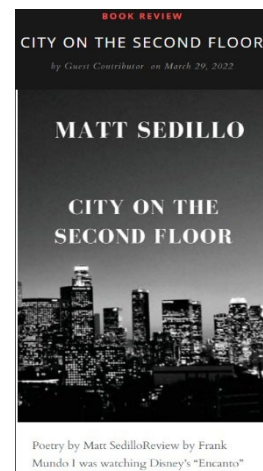
<https://angelcityreview.com/paper-birds-feather-by-feather-pajaros-de-papel-pluma-por-pluma-by-sonia-gutierrez/>

This collection of poetry by LA writer, poet, and educator Sonia Gutierrez has one of the most unique presentations I've ever seen. Each poem is bilingual and presented in English and Spanish – and a selection of those poems are then presented in the “interlingual” language known as Spanglish. Along with this review/interview, I managed to secure a recording of Gutierrez reading my favorite poem from the collection in Spanglish.

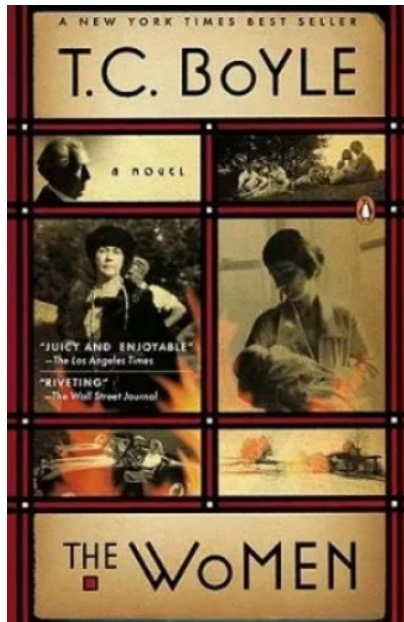
City on the Second Floor by Matt Sedillo

<https://angelcityreview.com/city-on-the-second-floor/>

In this essay, I challenge some of the major Los Angeles literary gatekeepers – specifically the LA Times, the Los Angeles Review of Books, and Rattle Magazine – and their motives behind ignoring one of the most popular local poets whose amazing work/story would be newsworthy anywhere else in the world.



Wild Child: An Interview with Bestselling Author TC Boyle



[“Throwback” Interview with author T.C. Boyle by Frank Mundo | Frank Mundo Writer's Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#)

Very few writers have had long-term success at writing both novels and collections of short stories. One of these writers is TC Boyle, distinguished professor at the prestigious creative writing program at USC and the prolific and long-renowned author of 12 novels and 9 short story collections (at the time).

On January 25th, 2010, both worlds collided with the paperback release of Boyle’s bestselling novel, *The Women*, and the hardcover release of his collection of fiction, *Wild Child* — the perfect opportunity to see for yourself why TC Boyle has earned a solid reputation as one of our nation’s

most humorous and entertaining storytellers in both genres.

The Forty Rules of Love: An Interview with Bestselling Author Elif Shafak

[Throwback Interview with Bestselling Author Elif Shafak by Frank Mundo | Frank Mundo Writer's Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#)

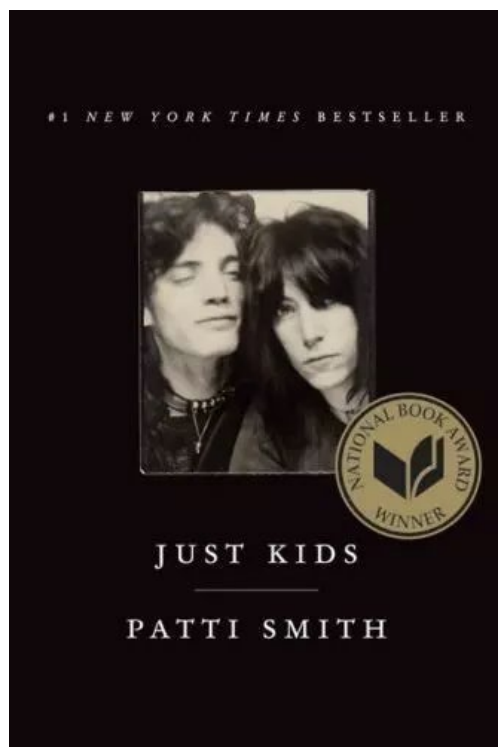
In Turkey, award-winning novelist Elif Shafak is a mega-star, the bestselling author of many acclaimed books — and the most widely-read female author in the country. Writing in both Turkish and English, Shafak’s work has been translated into twenty languages.

In the US, however, Shafak is probably best known for the controversy surrounding her novel, *The Bastard of Istanbul*, a brave and ambitious work for which she was indicted and prosecuted (and ultimately acquitted) under Article 301 by the Turkish government. Pregnant at the time, Shafak (the first fiction writer to be prosecuted under the law) became more of a symbol to us, a reminder of the precious freedoms we sometimes take for granted — but somehow her work was overlooked in the process.



Book Review: Just Kids by Patti Smith

[Book Review: Just Kids by Patti Smith | Frank Mundo Writer's Blog \(wordpress.com\)](#)



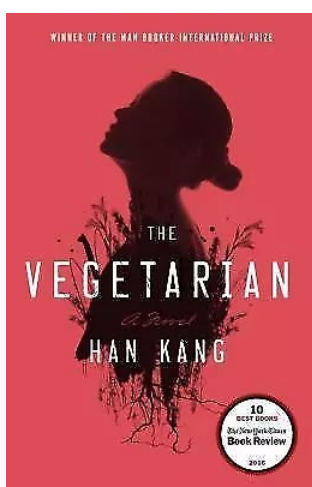
Bottom line: the writing is lovely and the story is fine. *Just Kids* is worthy of the attention and the accolades it's generating. I get it. I get why everyone is praising this book...

However, and it's a big however, this book was not for me. I'm just not the right audience for it — why?

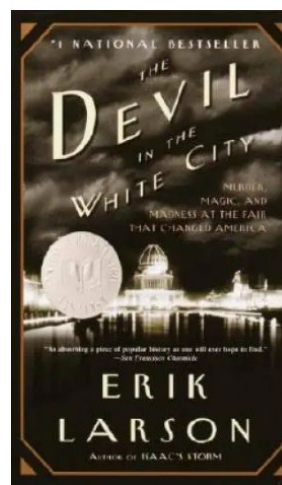
The author's utter adoration/idolization of the artist (an almost religious worship) and the supreme importance given to the aesthetic life are, in my opinion, old-fashion relics, romantic woo-hoo, from my parent's generation. This odd mystical certainty that the one true path to the one "true" art requires a life of sacrifice, an unrelenting dedicated commitment (enhanced by drugs and experimentation) to struggle and poverty is frustrating to me — and cruel, in a way, to continue to advance

to the current generation. It's like those faith-healing charlatans who, when they can't heal your particular illness, blame the failure of their powers on your own lack of faith.

QUICKIES



Part parable, part thriller, part cautionary tale, [The Vegetarian](#) by Han Kang is the crushing story of a family who seem both unwilling and unable to address the worsening mental illness of one of their own...



[The Devil in the White City](#) by Erik Larson deals with genius. The first is Daniel Burnham, the architect who builds the 1893 Chicago World's Fair. And the other is H.H. Holmes, one of the first known serial killers in the United States.

THE GOOD MEN PROJECT®

The conversation no one else is having.®

ESSAY: [Marriage Before, During and After a Heart Attack](#) by Frank Mundo
The Goodmen Project

Less than two weeks ago I had a heart attack, an acute myocardial infarction. It was during the Kelly Clarkson concert my wife and I (almost) attended at the Nokia Theater, downtown LA. The heart attack struck during the concert's opening act, so Nancy and I didn't actually see Kelly Clarkson perform.

The onset was slow, a kind of hot flash followed by cold sweat; I thought it was probably just nausea, perhaps from the heat or all the stupid people jumping around—or maybe it was something I'd eaten earlier in the day. After all, I'm only 38 years old; a heart attack wasn't even on my mind.

ESSAY: [How I Became a Mexican](#) by Frank Mundo

This is, by far, my most popular essay. Over the years, it's been featured, along with my poetry book *The Brubury Tales*, on the syllabi of many high school and college classes across the country. I've read versions of this essay more than 100 times in person and online for 1000s of students in English, Creative Writing, Poetry and Chicano and African American Studies classes.

Originally published in the Anthology textbook, *Ban This: The BSP Anthology of Xican@ Literature*, the essay was the opening chapter, edited by Santino J. Rivera, which was written in protest to Arizona laws that sought to ban Chicano and African-American Studies programs from public schools in the state – which was highlighted in a review from John Stapleton:

“What I expected from the start was a militant diatribe, a call to rise-up, a declaration of independence from America and by the end of the first chapter, Frank Mundo's “How I became a Mexican,” I was pulled into something more profound than just expressed angst



towards the systematic suppression of a culture. I was being pulled into the creative worlds by the variety of writers and poets that are on exhibition in this anthology.”

I read the essay for *Unheard LA – Live in Northridge* for its season three finale from the Plaza del Sol Performance Hall at California State University, Northridge. Host Bruce A. Lemon Jr. welcomed me and other featured storytellers:

Danielle Eubank. Damona Hoffman, Stuart Jacobson, Bryan Kett, Ellen Switkes, Richard Tom, and Jessica Lee Williamson.



KPCC In Person series Unheard LA is funded in part by a grant from The California Wellness Foundation.

Watch me read “[How I Became a Mexican](#)” live to more than 500 people. (Skip to 37 mins or enjoy the whole show.)

Check in often for more essays, book reviews and interviews by Frank Mundo....