

MANGUEL, Alberto. *The Traveler, the Tower, and The Worm: The Reader as Metaphor*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013. 978-0-8122-4523-3. Pp. 141. Hardback. \$24.95.

Alberto Manguel's career as a bibliophile began when he became a reader for Jorge Luis Borges at sixteen. Since then, he has authored a number of books on reading, including *The Dictionary of Imaginary Places* (1980), *A History of Reading* (1996), *A Reading Diary* (2004), *The Library at Night* (2007), *A Reader on Reading* (2010), as well as collections of nonfiction, works of fiction, and anthologies. *The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm*,

another volume on Manguel's recurrent topic, investigates the history of metaphors that describe reading and readers. However, the reader who is the subject of Manguel's contemplation is never defined; Manguel prefers to reflect on the way reading is discussed in literature. *The Tower* is an enlightening and enjoyable, if brief, treatment of reading that would be a particularly good option to use in introductory literature courses to increase students' familiarity with the canon of world literature while also allowing them to think critically about their own reading habits.

Manguel composed *The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm* as three lectures given over the course of two weeks in the spring of 2011 for the A. S. W. Rosenbach Lectures in Bibliography at the University of Pennsylvania. The pacing of *The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm* reflects the need to entertain a live audience: it is short and values breadth over depth. Although the text is written accessibly, deftly handling a thicket of references, it launches into a discussion of reading that presupposes familiarity with the canon of world literature, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, Cicero, Augustine, and the *Bible* to Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Flaubert; however, Manguel never ventures so deep into one of his examples that he risks losing his reader.

Each of Manguel's three lectures discusses one metaphor for reading. In the first, he portrays the reader as a traveler who follows Pascal's dictum that "the root of the world's misfortune lies in the fact that human beings are unable to remain in one room for twenty-four hours" (NOOTEBOOM 2006, 2). By arguing that the reader's journey takes on "new physical laws for the world of each specific book", rather than accepting the restricted dimensions of nature, Manguel asserts that readers are adventurers of the mind (26). In the second lecture, which focuses on the tower, the reader is compared to Hamlet, a recluse who fails to act meaningfully. The Ivory Tower, a contemporary belittlement of academia, also utilizes this symbolism, derived from Augustine who suspected that reading was helpful but ultimately insufficient for true understanding (16–7). The third lecture portrays readers as worms who burrow through pages unthinkingly. Don Quixote and Emma Bovary, characters whose comedies and tragedies occur when they confuse books for reality, are some of the voracious readers who belong to this paradigm. Although two of the three metaphors for reading—the Tower and the Worm—are negative, Manguel intentionally dignifies reading as a positive intellectual pursuit that, nevertheless, is frequently misunderstood.

Manguel stumbles only when he describes the complexity of contemporary reading practices in his first chapter and conclusion. In defense of tra-

ditional reading practices, he quotes Nicholas Carr, who, in *The Shallows: What the Internet is Doing to Our Brains*, insists that people are attempting to “convince themselves that surfing the Web is a suitable, even superior substitute for deep reading and other forms of calm and attentive thought” (2010, 112). Worried about our “permanent state of distractedness”, Manguel concludes his book—and his lectures—with the exhortation, “we are reading creatures, we ingest words, we are made of words” (120).

During Manguel’s discussion of the metaphors for reading, he thus mounts a defense of the book during the Internet age. But I wonder if hyperlinks, blogs, Twitter, and all the accoutrement of the Internet are really so foreboding. Despite Manguel’s belief that the Internet is a place of anonymity, everything we say online leaves an IP address tying our comments to our current location. The Internet has all the privileges and pitfalls of the book: it can be a tower, allowing us to satisfy our need to learn without the necessary experience. Cookies trail us on our virtual journeys, learning our predilections. The worm? What about the *hikikomori*, the young Japanese man or woman who avoids live social contact out of an addiction to the web? We are reading creatures; we will continue to read as ravenously as ever. But what we read, and how, has diversified. Perhaps an update to his book could consider a new symbol: the Surfer, who travels the world from the comfort of his computer, remains apart from the nature and society, retains a voracious appetite for words, all while catching one blog post and Twitter feed after another on an endless, flowing ocean of electronic text.

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