

national visions, and private intellectuals are not motivated to try.”

Missing from the different cases is any discussion of the exchanges between universities and the international “invisible” university structures that have evolved. What role do educational travelers, Fulbright scholars, international graduate training programs, and powerful authors such as Paulo Friere play in the way that higher education institutions evolve in different countries? How do connections between countries, real connections that result in concrete educational practices and cultures, create organizational cultures of dependency, resistance, or isolation? But even given this, the book would be very useful in a course on comparative higher education. The cases invite discussion, and each provides the starting point for projects and comparisons, especially within the theoretical framework suggested in the introductory chapter.—*Allan F. Burns, University of Florida, Gainesville*

Manguel, Alberto. *A History of Reading.* New York: Viking Penguin, 1996. 372p. \$26.95 alk. paper. ISBN 0-670-84302-4. LC 96-2703.

It probably is not too soon for the ALA to begin preparing a dossier on Manguel in support of his canonization as patron saint of reading. In the meantime, free life membership in the association would be appropriate. Alberto Manguel is one of those rare individuals of today: learned, urbane, self-aware, democratic, and generous. And he is passionately committed to readers (whoever, wherever), reading (whatever, however), and books (never met one he did not like). If, as a librarian and a reader, you are feeling a bit lonely in this, the twilight of the book, take heart: here is someone you should meet. Manguel will lead you on a delightfully idiosyncratic tour of his world—a world crowded with readers and crammed with books.

At the end of his tour, he comments: “Among the books I haven’t written—among the books I haven’t read but would like to read—is *The History of Reading*.” No, this is not *the* history of reading; it is not even history in any recognizable sense. Rather, it is a series of Montaigne-like essays on aspects of reading that draw on the author’s own reading and experiences. Like Montaigne’s classic, *A History of Reading* is deliberately autobiographical. It is the story of the author’s reading. For Manguel, we are what we read: “The association of books with their readers is unlike any other between objects and their users. . . . Books inflict upon their readers a symbolism far more complex than that of a simple utensil.” Manguel is the dinner guest who spends the evening scanning the spines of your books and accumulating observations about their owner, just as he wants his readers to do.

A noted writer—as well as noted reader—Manguel probably is not our “common reader.” He read Kipling and Stevenson to the blind Borges after school in Buenos Aires; he attended secondary school in France at a *lycée* outside Strasbourg where Wimpfeling and Beatus Rhenanus went to school; and he has his heroes—Augustine, Whitman, Proust, among other heavyweights. He is fluent in several foreign languages and even cites Hildegard of Bingen from Migne. He is as comfortable with the classics as he is with contemporary literary criticism. His cultural formation is broad.

A History of Reading is Manguel’s own curiosity cabinet of specimens of reading culled from literature and history, a capacious room strewn with examples of any and every type of reading experience one could imagine. It is non-narrational and defies easy summary. It moves deftly back and forth from Mesopotamia to the present, and considers such topics as reading aloud, si-

lent reading, hearing reading, reading in bed (highly recommended), reading pictures, the shape of the book, translating as reading, and memory and reading. Within a single chapter, the reader is led from Augustine to Emerson and from medieval *jongleurs* to workers in Cuban cigar factories in the nineteenth century. Although some may be confused or put off by this “method,” the impact of the book derives precisely from Manguel’s ability to juxtapose the disparate and the different.

Through it all, though, there are at least two themes that connect the tissue of examples and episodes that stretches throughout the book. One is Manguel’s devotion to the privacy of reading. For Manguel, the act of reading—no matter where or how it is done—is the quintessential private act. Indeed, it is the private nature of reading that mocks any attempt to write *the* history of reading. Reading defines a zone of personal space that no one or no thing can take from us. If we have nothing else, we have at least that space. However, it is not an introverted, alienated privacy that attracts Manguel. Rather, privacy is the precondition for creating, through reading, bonds of community across time and space. Reading becomes an assertion of fellowship and solidarity; readers meet other readers. In a book packed with all manner of illustrations, one in particular stands out: a two-page spread of a shot of three men in suits, overcoats, and hats silently browsing the shelves of a bombed-out library in London, in 1940. Knee deep in detritus, the gents respectfully go about their business as if nothing would ever deter them. They will persist alone together, readers each and all.

The book’s other theme anchors it firmly in the postmodern present: the omnipotence of the reader. The author, remember, is dead. There are only readers and texts, and it is readers who con-

struct the texts. The author is only an author; the author must die—or least disappear—in order for the text to live. Manguel bestows on the reader an unbounded freedom to create and re-cre-

Who could not like someone who asserts a truism that few would dare acknowledge: “I judge a book by its cover; I judge a book by its shape.”

ate texts at will. In the kingdom of the book, the reader is sovereign. Yet as appealing as this voluntarism is, it surely overlooks the extent to which readers, too, exist in contexts—contexts that constrain and direct their imaginations. If we truly are what we read, then the latter in some measure defines the limits of our creative freedom.

However one feels about the book, it is hard to come away from it without liking its author. He is warm and inviting, and he has a Borgesian sense of playfulness that allows everyone to feel at home in his crazy sandbox. Who could not like someone who asserts a truism that few would dare acknowledge: “I judge a book by its cover; I judge a book by its shape. . . .” Right on! But I must confess to finding the cover of Manguel’s book merely interesting rather than compelling. However, do not throw it away. Inside, it contains a “reader’s timeline” running from 4000 BCE to the present, suitable for display as a handy reference guide. If you want a history of reading from *A History of Reading*, that is where you will get it.—*Michael Ryan, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia*

The National Electronic Library: A Guide to the Future for Library Managers. Ed. Gary M. Pitkin. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Pr. (The Greenwood Library Management Collection), 1996. 192p. \$55. ISBN 0-313-29613-8.