



The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm: The Reader as Metaphor

Alberto Manguel

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As far as one can tell, human beings are the only species for which the world seems made up of stories, Alberto Manguel writes. We read the book of the world in many guises: we may be travelers, advancing through its pages like pilgrims heading toward enlightenment. We may be recluses, withdrawing through our reading into our own ivory towers. Or we may devour our books like burrowing worms, not to benefit from the wisdom they contain but merely to stuff ourselves with countless words.

With consummate grace and extraordinary breadth, the best-selling author of *A History of Reading* and *The Library at Night* considers the chain of metaphors that have described readers and their relationships to the text-that-is-the-world over a span of four millennia. In figures as familiar and diverse as the book-addled Don Quixote and the pilgrim Dante who carries us through the depths of hell up to the brilliance of heaven, as well as Prince Hamlet paralyzed by his learning, and Emma Bovary who mistakes what she has read for the life she might one day lead, Manguel charts the ways in which literary characters and their interpretations reflect both shifting attitudes toward readers and reading, and certain recurrent notions on the role of the intellectual: "We are reading creatures. We ingest words, we are made of words. . . . It is through words that we identify our reality and by means of words that we ourselves are identified."

The Traveler, the Tower, and the Worm: The Reader as Metaphor Details

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Argos says

Manguel'in ilk kitaplar?ndan "Okuman?n Tarihi", "Okuma Günlü?ü", "Geceleyin Kütüphane" ola?anüstü güzel deneme kitaplar?yd?. Daha sonra ç?kan "Okumalar Okumas?"nda o tad?n biraz kaçm?? oldu?unu hissettim. Bu kitab? ise gerçekten kötü. Çok birikimli ve entellektüel donan?ml? oldu?u bilinen Manguel bu kitab?n? herkesi "derin okuyucu" kabul ederek yazm??. Bir çok karakter ve kitab? arac? kullan?p kendince metaforlar yaratmaya çal??m??. Dünyan?n okumam?z gereken bir kitap oldu?unu söylemek ne kadar do?ru bir saptama yap?yorsa, okuru farkl? karakterlere büründürmek için bilgiçlikle absürd yakla??mlar sergilemesi de o kadar yanl?? olmu?.

Bir edebiyatç? ya felsefi metin yazmaya kalkmamal? bunu felsefecilere b?rakmal? ya da edebi bir dü?ünceyi felsefi kuram olarak okuyucuya sunmamal?. Bunu yapt??nda, bu kitapta oldu?u gibi okuyucu ezen, kafas?na zorla entellektüel yükünü bo?altan, okumas? çok zor ve neticede bir ka??k bal için bir çuval keçi boynuzu yemek zorunda kal?nan bir yap?t ç?kar ortaya. Ben baz? cümleleri iki- üç kere okuma gafletine dü?üm sonu? de?i?medi.

Alan Alexandrino says

Extraordinário!

Pr Mnz says

“somos criaturas leitoras, ingerimos palavras, somos feitos de palavras, sabemos que palavras são nosso meio de estar no mundo, e é através das palavras que identificamos nossa realidade e por meio de palavras somos, nós mesmos, identificados.” alberto manguel posiciona o leitor em três estados: viajante do mundo, isolado em uma torre e devorador de livros na personificação de uma traça. todos os três com lados positivos e negativos, sob diferentes pontos de vista. embora o livro tenha um pézinho na leitura teórica, ele se torna simples de ler para quem gosta da temática. e gosto, especialmente, do leitor enquanto viajante. como lembra o autor utilizando uma citação de agostinho: a leitura é uma forma de viajar, “não por lugares, mas por sentimentos”.

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Cintia Andrade says

Que coisa maravilhosa esse livro. Manguel traça três perfis como arquétipos de leitores: o leitor-viajante, o leitor isolado em sua torre de marfim e o leitor-traça (bookworm), que devora livros mas não os absorve de forma alguma. Ele relaciona cada tipo de leitor a um clássico da literatura (*A Divina Comédia*, *Hamlet* e *Dom Quixote*, respectivamente), então acho que ajuda se você tiver lido estes livros. Muito bem escrito,

muito fluido e muito inteligente. Recomendo muito.

Simge says

Okurun ve okuman?n "niteli?i"ne yönelik, metaforlarla fark? bir hale bürünmü?, ?ahane bir Manguel kitab?...Büyük keyif alarak çevirdim kitap boyunca sayfalar?...Benim için en güzel bonus da, (zaman zaman konuya ilgili spoiler alm?? olsam da:)) konunun tad?ml?k olarak di?er kitaplar arac?l???yla anlat?lm?? / desteklenmi? olmas?yd?. Okunmal!?

Jonathan Fenile de Castro says

A necessary reading for every literature enthusiast, student, and for the avid readers out there. It teached me a lot of myself as a reader, and showed me how can I become a better reader.

Sinem A. says

"hap niyetine bi doz Manguel" diyebiliriz kitap için. k?sac?k bir kitap olmas?n?n yan?nda yazar "okuman?n tarihi" kitab?nda eksik kalan meteфорlar? bu kitab?nda tamamlad??n? söylüyor.

Tuna Turan says

Kitap pek çok ?eydir. An?lar?n ambar?, zaman ve mekan?n koydu?u k?saltmalar? a?ma arac?, derin dü?ünme ve yarat?l?c?l?k alan?, kendimizin ve ba?kalar?n?n deneyim havuzu, ayd?nlatma, mutluluk, bazende avunç kayna??...
K?saca kitap; öze aç?lan kap?!

Carlos says

La fascinación que ejerce la lectura sobre nosotros es enigmática, casi mística: ser capaces de (re)crearnos a nosotros mismos tan sólo con ir posando los ojos sobre letras impresas, viajar a otros parajes –e incluso otras dimensiones–; en suma, alimentar nuestra imaginación, nuestro intelecto, nuestro espíritu... y sobre esta fascinación gira el libro de Alberto Manguel “El viajero, la torre y la larva”.

El volumen se compone de tres apartados: “El lector como viajero”, “El lector en la torre de marfil” y “La larva de los libros”. El primero nos invita a imaginarnos el orbe como un titánico libro, y recorrerlo, viajarlo, como el acto de su lectura... es decir: al descubrirlo, lo estamos leyendo.

El segundo nos refiere al erudito cenobita, al anacoreta que se encierra en su torre para consagrarse al estudio y a la lectura (que, como bien refiere el autor, ha tenido sus detractores y sus defensores); y la última jornada hace una comparación con una alimaña que consume “literalmente” los libros –es decir, se alimenta de ellos–, pero sin obtener ningún beneficio. Todos aquellos que devoran obra tras obra, pero nada permanece en su interior.

Aunque breve, la erudición de Manguel –el libro es pletórico en cuanto a referencias literarias, pictóricas y filosóficas– nos entrega una visión lúcida y precisa sobre el arte de la lectura; como bien dice Javier Rodríguez Marcos, “toda su obra defiende tanto la gran literatura como la soberana libertad del lector. Permite una lectura cada vez más profunda, cada vez más intensa y cada vez distinta”. No podría estar más de acuerdo.

Michael says

The three chapters of the work comprise an edited version of the author's 2011 Rosenbach Lectures, delivered at the University of Pennsylvania. In the book, he expands on some themes introduced in his excellent [A History of Reading](#) regarding the importance of metaphor in constructing and understanding a written work. While the occasional nature of these remarks make their brevity understandable and even inevitable, I found myself wanting more; although, given my absolute fascination with the words of my favorite writer on reading, I know that nothing short of a fortnight spent chatting with Manguel in his library would satisfy my wants. Failing that, I gladly read anything he has written and always profit from his words. He is a writer who makes one think. Not only do I think about what he has to say about a text, I often have to revisit that text in order to try out new perspectives he has given me. Alberto Manguel is one of the most intelligent and best-read authors I have ever encountered. Even such a brief offering as this is well worth the time invested in reading it.

Jeffrey Keeten says

Cosmic Man by Hildegard von Bingen

”The book is many things. As a repository of memory, a means of overcoming the constraints of time and space, a site for reflection and creativity, an archive of the experience of ourselves and others, a source of illumination, happiness, and sometimes consolation, a chronicle of events past, present, and future, a mirror, a companion, a teacher, a conjuring-up of the dead, an amusement, the book in its many incarnations, from clay tablet to electronic page, has long served as a metaphor for many of our essential concepts and undertakings.”

Every time I read an Alberto Manguel book, I always think to myself, why haven't I read everything this man has written? His relationship to books is on a DNA level that speaks to the heart of my own relationship with books.

Part one: The Reader as Traveler

”To live, then, is to travel through the book of the world, and to read, to make one's way through a book, is to live, to travel through the world itself.”

We simply can't travel physically everywhere. I love to travel, but sometimes there are places or events that are adventures best experienced from the armchair. Unless one has a time travelling machine, we need writers to take us by the hand and usher us back in time to see through their eyes the building of pyramids, the crash of swords on shields, or the horrors of the black death. There is no real separation for me between

travelling physically and travelling mentally. It is essential, I believe, to do both, and each enhances the other.

"The pages to come promise a point of arrival, a glimmer on the horizon; the pages already read allow for the possibility of recollection. And in the present of the text we exist suspended in a constantly changing moment, an island of time shimmering between what we know of the text and what yet lies ahead. Every reader is an armchair Crusoe."

One of the hazards of reading a Manguel book is the long list of must read books that are sprinkled throughout his text like reader beacons. I'm always pleased when I've read something he references, but I also feel a dash of inferiority, all too often, when he leads me to something I haven't had a chance to venture into yet.

"And we, as followers of Dante's journey, accepting the role now assigned to us, must in turn lose our ordinary identity and become pilgrims ourselves, transformed through the act of reading into necessary characters in the story, addressed by Dante, over and over again, to warn us, guide us, instruct us, beseech us to reflect and to do our enlightened best."

Dante puts an extra responsibility on the reader to be involved in his story. After all, hell potentially affects us all, depending on what level of belief you have for an afterlife. We should all pay attention. Manguel had me tearing my library apart looking for my copy of collected Dante that clearly is listed on my library inventory, but alas the book eludes me. It is only after some searching of my memory that I remember loaning my copy to my son with the jocular, magnanimous words...just go ahead and keep it. *sigh* I read Dante in college, of course, and definitely need to walk with him, talk with him again, and give myself a few vivid nightmares for a week or so.

Manguel quotes Orhan Pamuk from his book *Silent House*, which I have not read... dagnabbit. *"You can't start out again in life, that's a carriage ride you only take once, but with a book in your hand, no matter how confusing and perplexing it might be, once you've finished it, you can always go back to the beginning; if you like, you can read it through again, in order to figure out what you couldn't understand before, in order to understand life."*

I think sometimes readers are so intent on finishing the journey through a book that they forget to slow down, maybe even just stop completely to look at the scenery or take a moment to savor the light fantastic of wonderfully written sentences or luxuriate in the gorgeous human interactions illuminated by an inspired pen or maybe allow the emotions of love, joy, and sorrow of the characters to fully blossom in their own hearts. Sometimes I simply have to set a book aside, go for a walk, pick up another book to read for a while, or just simply sit stunned for a moment and let myself slowly come back to "real life." Reading should overwhelm you, and if it isn't, you aren't reading the right books, or you simply aren't allowing yourself to be castaway on the ink waves of endless possibilities. It isn't about how many books you've read, it is the number of books that you have gnawed every enlightening morsel from, leaving only bleached bones behind.

"Now we must once more learn to read slowly, profoundly, comprehensively, whether on paper or on the screen: to travel in order to return with what we've read. Only then will we, in the deepest sense, be able to call ourselves readers."

Part two: The Reader in the Ivory Tower

I have recently made the decision to divorce myself from the greedy, mostly mindless, shallowness of the world of business and have placed myself in my own ivory tower. I'm typing these words from my beautiful, sheesham desk in my home office, surrounded by bulging shelves of books, a Scottish Terrier who though sleeping is guarding my back from torches and pitchforks, and all those interesting objects that I have collected on my travels that inspire me to seek unseen mountains, to listen to the murmurs of distant seas, and experience the diversity of cultures that will help me see the world with fresh eyes. Needless to say, what a relevant section to read at this point in my life.

”It was Coleridge who began the tradition of seeing Hamlet as a man ‘paralyzed by excess of thought.’”

Readers always run the risk of snapping the final tethers that bind us to this Earth. Hamlet is, of course, a voracious reader, and some would say that he becomes so enamored with the way things should be that he struggles to deal with the way things actually are. I often say how wonderful it would be if I could write the dialogue for all the people in my life. Think how brilliantly life would move along if I had that power. Unfortunately, though literature gives a manual for how life should be, unless everyone reads what you read and interprets it the way that you do, this is just one of those impossible dreams. Life, even at the best of times, is always going to fall short of the pillow box of literary experiences. Hamlet finds this realization to be more than he can live with; of course, the rest of us readers have to soldier on and keep trying to apply what we learn from our reading to those around us.

”How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable,’ he says, ‘seem to me all the uses of this world!” If only Hamlet could have stayed in the enclosed rose scented garden of his library. Hamlet insists *”to confront the book in his hands with the book of the world.”* It is like comparing a whale to a toadstool.

”Today, the reader in the ivory tower has become emblematic of yet another position. At a time when the values that our societies put forward as desirable are those of speed and brevity, the slow, intense, reflective process of reading is seen as inefficient and old fashioned.”

I love the whole process of pondering, of masticating on a problem. I love to hear the rusted gears of my brain start to turn and the scurrying feet of all those clerks running down the hallways searching the corners of my brain for a gem of a thought that I've shoved into the matrix from something I've read or experienced that may shed light or add layers to the current problem I am wrestling with. I've been known to be witty or even charming, but it is only a foil to buy time in the face of someone needing an answer...now.

Quick, snap decisions are sexy and venerated, but when they are held up to the light of day, they frequently melt into a puddle. If you are a speed junky or suffering from massive ADHD or just enjoy swimming at the shallow end of the pool, then the current world is probably to your liking, but to someone like myself, who prefers to dive into the deep end and explore the nooks and crevices, the prospect of moving faster never leads to satisfaction.

I'm the guy who will find the mermaid.

Part three: The Bookworm

”Seen from the perspective of those who do not read or inordinately care for books, the passionate engagement with the page seems vacuous and unhealthy, resulting, as in Grandville’s cartoon, in a creature not of flesh and blood but of paper and ink. Every reader, past and present, has at least once

heard the injunction: ‘Stop reading! Go out and live!’--as if reading and life were two separate states of being.”

I heard some statistic that only 90 million Americans ever read a book. That means that 210 million Americans are not readers of any sort. If we parse down the 90 million, we would probably find that only a fraction of them are voracious readers. Somewhere in the process of growing up, whether it is in the school system or the seduction of TV and video games or just plain laziness, people somehow never develop a relationship with books. Reading is work, pleasurable work for those of us who see the cost in time a small matter compared to the benefits of emerging on the other side of our reading experience either entertained or enlightened or both.

The attitudes that most Americans have toward books is appalling and baffling to those of us who consider books to be better worthwhile companions than most people. These people, dare I say book haters, are dismissive and even disparaging towards reading and those who read. One statement I hear all the time is, “I wish I had time to read.” Implying of course that I have SO much more time in my pathetic life to read than they do. My reply has become, “Everyone has time to read. You just choose to do other things.” When I say it, I try to imply back that what they consider to be “better” than reading is mostly just a frivolous waste of time, in my opinion. Every time I’m waiting in a doctor’s office or at the auto shop, I look around at my fellow human beings and watch them stare blankly at the wall or play a game on their phone, rather than read. **I can practically watch the unused little gray cells fall screaming from their ears.**

”Being a bookworm need not always carry a negative connotation. We are reading creatures, we ingest words, we are made of words, we know that words are our means of being in the world, and it is through words that we identify our reality and by means of words that we are ourselves identified.”

It is detrimental to the experience of being human not to read. I’ve tried to tempt many friends and family members to become readers, but with little success. It seems we are either readers or not readers, with an occasional lost soul finding his way back to sanity out of his bookless wilderness. Of course, I will continue to hone my pitch and take a trip to the crossroads if I have to, if it means I can find a way to inspire new legions of people to become readers.

If you wish to see more of my most recent book and movie reviews, visit <http://www.jeffreykeeten.com>
I also have a Facebook blogger page at: <https://www.facebook.com/JeffreyKeeten>

NAMIK SOMEL says

Bir kitab? yüzeysel ve h?zl? okumak m?, yoksa metinleri sindire sindire okumak m? do?ru bir yöntemdir. Kutsal kitaplardan, G?lgam?? Destan?na, Dante'nin ?lahi Komedya's?ndan Shakespeare 'e insano?lunun okuma deneyimi, kitap delisi ve kitap kurdu kavramlar? anlat?lm??.. Ö?rencili?inde dört y?l Borges' e kitap okumu? olan yazar, kitap okurlar?n?na bir bak?? aç?s? sunmaya çal??m??.. Bu güzel denemeyi severek okudum. Tavsiyede bulunan ve kitab? bana hediye eden dostum Ramazan Diler'e te?ekkür ederim.

Mehmet says

Bu kitapta, "okuman?n" tarihini okuyoruz. "Okur" insanlar?n zihinde neyi ç?r??r?yordu? Okumak nas?l

bir fil olarak insanlar?n zihninde tezahür etti; bunlar? görüyoruz.

Tarihi boyutuyla ele alan yazar yer yer görselleri de kullanm??. Bu görsellerde "okur"un zihinlerde olu?turdu?u imgenin resme nas?l dönü?tü?ünü de görmü? oluyoruz.

Baris Ozyurt says

“Toplumdan elini aya??n? çeken ayd?nlar?n genel anlay??? da farkl? sebepler ve farkl? iddialarla Marksist dü?ünürler için alay konusu olmu?tu. Antonio Gramsci ayd?n?n rolünün, Hamlet'in aksine, beklemek ve dü?unceye dalmak olmad???n? ?iddetle savunanlardand?, ona göre toplumun çetrefilli sorunlar?n? ortaya koyup irdelemesi ve çözüme ula?t?rmas? gerekirdi, ayr?ca kapitalizmden sosyalizme geçi?te sorumluluk almal? ve sosyalist devleti idare etmeliydi; yaln?zca devrimci elit de?il okuyan bütün halk onun zekâ becerilerini bilinçli olarak yerine getirmeliydi.

Gramsci ayd?n?n toplumdaki rolüyle fazlas?yla ilgiliydi. Salt ansiklopedik bilgiyle s?n?rl? kültür fikrini topa tutar ve baz? ö?rencilerle profesyonellerin hiyerar?ik olarak kendilerini kitlelerden ay?r?c? tav?r tak?nd?klar?n? dü?ünürdü. ‘Hayat?n? kesin ve vazgeçilmez bir görevi yerine getirerek geçiren ve yürüttü?ü faaliyet onlar?nkinden yüz kat daha de?erli olan en vas?fl? i?çiden bile farkl? ve üstün görürler kendilerini. Gelgelelim bu kültür de?il, bilgiçlik taslamad?r, bilme zekâs? de?il, bilgiyi satma zekâs?d?r ve ona kar?? tepki göstermek kesinlikle do?ru olur.’ Gramsici’ye göre, ‘bütün insanlar ayd?nd?r ama toplumdaki herkes ayd?nlar?n i?levlerine sahip de?ildir; ba?ka bir deyi?le herkes sosyal ayd?n i?levi görmez.’ “(s.76)

Gabriela Ventura says

Alberto Manguel é ótimo até nos textos de fôlego mais curto, como os simpáticos ensaios reunidos nessa coletânea. Com erudição e bom humor, e a partir de três metáforas específicas (o viajante, a torre e a traça do título) Manguel fala sobre as ideias acerca da figura do leitor - e, ato contínuo, da representação da leitura - ao longo dos séculos. Uma delícia.
