



Alberto Manguel est l'auteur des lecteurs, des écrivains et de la littérature. Toute sa vie, il s'est consacré avec une avidité et une curiosité infinies à l'étude du livre, à sa défense et sa réhabilitation, jusqu'à constituer une bibliothèque de trente-cinq mille ouvrages dans son prieuré de Mondion, en France. Il a été le lecteur de Borges lorsque ce dernier perdait la vue et reste « un lecteur superlatif, un lecteur au second degré, un Lecteur des lecteurs ». Pour écrire ce texte, commandé par les éditions Take5 afin de faire écho aux photographies d'Ali Kazma dans le livre d'artiste *Recto Verso*, l'auteur a choisi un cahier standard, au format d'écolier. Est-ce un clin d'œil à la naissance précoce de sa passion pour la littérature? Fils de diplomate, Alberto Manguel a en effet compensé l'instabilité de ses déménagements successifs par une immobilité choisie, dédiée à la lecture dans sa chambre.

C'est un autoportrait en creux, tissé avec les fils de l'histoire de la littérature, qu'Alberto Manguel dessine à travers ces lignes. Par ses

lectures innombrables et ses choix très personnels d'auteur, l'écrivain dresse une cartographie de son univers.

Pas d'éclats graphiques ni de fioritures dans la présentation du manuscrit. Alberto Manguel sait que cette histoire de la littérature se suffit à elle-même, et son écriture bien formée, régulière et ronde, laisse toute sa place à l'imagination, un peu comme un analogon du plaisir simple et charnel que la lecture peut nous procurer. Pas de ratures non plus : c'est une culture « digérée », intériorisée, que l'auteur partage. De l'interdiction par le général Pinochet de *Don Quichotte* à la censure par les Japonais de *Pinocchio*, en passant par celle du *Magicien d'Oz* ou de *L'Attrape-cœurs*, elle est pleine de rebondissements, parfois violents, parfois passionnels.

Dans ce carnet autographe, un seul dessin illustre cet autoportrait écrit à travers l'histoire de la littérature : le plan de la bibliothèque

du presbytère de l'écrivain, « un labyrinthe où l'on n'est pas censé se perdre, mais se trouver ». Ce plan représente-t-il le corps symbolique de l'auteur? La bibliothèque, pièce centrale et incontournable de tout lieu, est décrite comme un être vivant : sérieuse et bien rangée le jour, frondeuse et subversive la nuit, elle peut être l'objet, tout comme le corps, de violences (Alexandrie), de brimades (censure), mais ne plie pas. Comme le montre très bien la vidéo consacrée par l'artiste turc Ali Kazma à la bibliothèque d'Alberto Manguel pour réaliser son portrait, l'auteur nous rappelle que le livre est un instrument de conscience et de liberté autant qu'il est un passeport pour des voyages infinis et merveilleux.

À travers ce texte, il nous invite à prendre conscience de cette chaîne humaniste qui nous lie inexorablement et que nous oublions parfois. « Les bibliothèques ne sont pas de simples dépôts dédiés à l'érudition, mais apparaissent comme le cœur vivant d'une civilisation.

Elles irriguent et nourrissent notre connaissance de l'être humain, nous renseignent sur ses forces et ses failles. Dans les ouvrages qu'elles rassemblent, les différentes strates de mémoire et de réflexion se superposent et se rejoignent à travers les époques pour constituer un socle de civilisation. »

C. E.

* Toutes les citations sont d'Alberto Manguel.

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all the time. But literature reminds us that they are there, these human qualities, forming our bones as certainly as birth succeeds death. They too define us.

To avoid the memory of both the epiphanies and the honors of our species, almost as soon as writing was invented, we invented libraries. The libraries known to every reader constitute, in some sense, his or her autobiography. I remember, with a feeling of both fondness and apprehension, the libraries of my school days. I remember the library of ~~the~~ the Colegio Nacional de Buenos Aires, my alma mater: the imposing wooden doors, the welcoming gloom, the green-shaded lamps that reminded me vaguely of the lamps in sleeping-car compartments, the seemingly endless shelves of books towering up to the darkening ceiling, many undisturbed for centuries. I remember the silence

especially,

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Loarca's poem at "The Unfaithful Bride," La Celestina at the brothel scene, Cortázar's Ray Breonio at the chapter in which the young boy is seduced by the sailor.

constantly broken by whispered matches of conversation and nervous laughter, the distrustful librarian who was always trying to find excuses not to release the requested title, the forbidden pages at which certain books would spontaneously fall open. How these fiery texts had found their way into our scrupulous library we never knew and we wondered how long it would be before the librarian discovered that, under his very nose, generation after generation of corruptible students passed on to one another the names of secretly scandalous books.

Wandering through the stacks of one of the world's great libraries, Jorge Luis Borges, the blind director, once imagined that the millions of volumes around him constituted not a world of the universe but the universe itself, its *Opferbringer* as it were. The idea is thrilling: that everything we know, that everything we believe we can know

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The library at night is not for every reader. Michel de Montaigne, for instance, disagreed with my preference. He, at least, he spoke of libraries not as biographies, since the use of their words was just beginning to change in the sixteenth century (not even the third floor of his tower, despite its a dedicated about 17) since these most of the days of my life and most of the hours of the day. I am here, there at night. At night, Montaigne says, since he believed that the body suffered enough for the sake of the reading mind. "Books have many pleasant qualities for those who know how to choose them, but there is no good without effort; it is not a plain and pure pleasure, not more so than chess, it has its disadvantages, and they are many, the small defects, but the body, which can I have not forgotten, remains inactive, it grows weary and sad."

light of day, nothing. If the library in the morning suggests a mirror of the store and reasonable order of the world, the library at night seems to rejoice in the world's essential, joyful muddle.

The library in which I have at long last collected my books began life as a barn, in a village south of the Loire, sometime in the fifteenth century. When I first saw it, forming one of the branches of a U-shaped ring of buildings, all that was left was a single stone wall, separating the property from a chicken run and the neighbor's field. According to village legend, before it held the barn, the wall belonged to one of the two castles that Tristan l'Hermite, minister of Louis XI of France and notorious for his cruelty, built for his sons around 1433. The first of the

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a farmer's field magnolia tree. As soon as I saw the wall, I knew that here was where I would build the room to house my books. I wanted a room paneled in dark wood, with soft pools of light and comfortable chairs. Ideally, I imagined niches that began at my waist and went only as high as the fingertips of my stretched-out arm, since the books relinquished to heights that require ladders or to depths that force the reader to crawl on the floor, receive far less attention than ^{high} middle-ground fellows. But these ideal arrangements would have required a library three or four times the size of the vanished barn and, as Robert Louis Stevenson so mournfully put it: "that is the bitterness of art: you see a good effect, and some nonsense about cause

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a farmer's field on one side and shading a magnolia bush and hydrangeas on the other. As soon as I saw the wall, I knew that here was where I would build the room to house my books. I wanted a room paneled in dark wood, with soft pools of light and comfortable chairs. Ideally, I imagined niches that began at my waist and went only as high as the fingertips of my stretched-out arm, since the books relinquished to heights that require ladders or to depths that force the reader to crawl on the floor, receive far less attention than ^{high} middle-ground fellows. But these ideal arrangements would have required a library three or four times the size of the vanished barn and, as Robert Louis Stevenson so mournfully put it: "that is the bitterness of art: you see a good effect, and some nonsense about cause

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LIBRARY

needed by:

1. stacks
2. sections of catalogues
3. special collections
4. generous choices
5. official social guidelines
6. bureaucracy
7. budget
8. size
9. availability

as well as choice, shapes a library's catalogue. Particulars of taste and idiosyncratic restrictions are to be expected and to be expected in a private collection, but they inform as well collections intended for a wider audience. A public library is a paradox, a building set aside for an essentially private craft (reading) which must now take place in a communal space. Locked inside the reader of an individual book, each reader also forms part of the community of readers which the library defines. Under the library's roof, these readers share an illusion of freedom, convinced that the entire reading realm is theirs for the asking. The fact. Their choice is constrained in a number of ways: by the stack (open or closed) on which the book sits, by the section of the library in which it has been catalogued, by privileged notions of reserved rooms or special collections, by official guidelines based on what society considers "proper", by bureaucratic

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about Montaigne and with the reader who confesses that he will carry Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase & Fable to his desert island or his deathbed; that I and another unnamed reader are not mixed for one another because of the unmentionable titles she lists among her favorite books; that I wouldn't even consider frequenting the same cafe as a reader who found Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde a dreadful let-down; and that yet another reader, fanatic of Bruno Schulz, and I, are bottom buddies, braving the world with Schulz's *The Street of Crocodiles* in hand.

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