



**A Reader on Reading**, by Alberto Manguel (Yale, £12.99)

Over his lifetime, Manguel has accumulated 30,000 books. He has only ever banished one from his library - Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*: "It infected the shelves with its prurient descriptions of deliberately inflicted pain." He is not a fan of ebooks either, preferring "the solid flesh of paper and ink". This collection of essays written over two decades explores the central role reading has played in his life. They range from his traumatic realisation aged eight (while reading *Treasure Island*) that the "world peopled by words" is not the same as the prosaic world of our daily lives, to a paper entitled "How Pinocchio Learned to Read", in which he castigates our political leaders for being "barely literate" and having purely economic values: "Our schools and universities are becoming mere training grounds for the workforce." Reading - the creative dialogue with a text - should be at the heart of our culture, for the art of reading "defines our species". Manguel ranges from the Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh* to Borges's Infinite Library of Babel, wearing his erudition lightly and never failing to cast light on the texts.

**PD Smith**