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In this major collection of his essays, Alberto Manguel, whom George Steiner has called "the Casanova of reading," argues that the activity of reading, in its broadest sense, defines our species. "We come into the world intent on finding narrative in everything," writes Manguel, "landscape, the skies, the faces of others, the images and words that our species create." Reading our own lives and those of others, reading the societies we live in and those that lie beyond our borders, reading the worlds that lie between the covers of a book are the essence of A Reader on Reading.

The thirty-nine essays in this volume explore the crafts of reading and writing, the identity granted to us by literature, the far-reaching shadow of Jorge Luis Borges, to whom Manguel read as a young man, and the links between politics and books and between books and our bodies. The powers of censorship and intellectual curiosity, the art of translation, and those "numinous memory palaces we call libraries" also figure in this remarkable collection. For Manguel and his readers, words, in spite of everything, lend coherence to the world and offer us "a few safe places, as real as paper and as bracing as ink," to grant us room and board in our passage.