



letters from age seven to 70 – just before she died – the book is virtually Bethell's autobiography. There are many letters to fellow poets and writers, and also to her publishers, but the heart of the book is the letters to Bethell's dearly loved companion Effie Pollen, on whom she saw "Death pounce with dreadful mastery".

process, according to reviewer Diana Balham, a charming and accessible book about the times, when the intelligence of most women was mocked and marginalised by male chauvinism. Rejected eventually by Voltaire, du Chatelet died at 43 after giving birth to a baby girl who also died.

THE QUR'AN: A BIOGRAPHY, by Bruce Lawrence (Allen & Unwin, \$27.99). In 200 pages Lawrence attempts the virtually impossible: a lucid, accessible, comprehensive analysis of the great scripture of Islam, from its origins to its most modern interpretations. Osama bin Laden's fundamentalist version of the Qur'an's teachings doesn't emerge from these pages very well. Reviewer Sam Finemore was deeply impressed, describing this book as an essential read for anyone wanting a clearer image of the foundations of Islam.

THE SECRET MAN: The Story of Watergate's Deep Throat, by Bob Woodward (Simon & Schuster, \$30). *Washington Post* reporter and Watergate maven Bob Woodward was on the receiving end of a scoop last year when *Vanity Fair* outed former FBI assistant director W Mark Felt, then suffering dementia, as Deep Throat. But Woodward's book is better, no reheated leftovers from the main course of the Nixon presidency, but a satisfying, zesty yarn from a still-gripping history. The story is often surprising (Nixon knew Felt was an FBI source for news stories; Felt was convicted of – and pardoned for – conspiring to violate civil rights). Woodward is refreshing about the agony of disclosing Deep Throat, and Carl Bernstein adds a feisty tailpiece.

WOMEN AND CHILDREN LAST: The Burning of the Emigrant Ship *Cospatrick*, by Charles R. Clark (Otago University Press, \$39.95). Packed with 429 British emigrants bound for the young colony of New Zealand, the *Cospatrick* got no further than the south Atlantic, where most of those on board perished in a terrible fire in November 1874. For the first time the full story is told in a thoroughly researched book whose images of hope, terror and survival carry a compelling power. The ship's fate, wrote reviewer Denis Welch, seems "hauntingly emblematic of the perils attendant upon the British settlement of this country".

MEMOIRS/LETTERS
IRAN AWAKENING, by Shirin Ebadi with Azadeh Moaveni (Random House, \$37.99). Subtitled "From Prison to Peace Prize: One Woman's Struggle at the Crossroads of History", this is the personal story of a woman who became a senior judge in the days of the Shah but was persecuted after the 1979 revolution and busted to clerk. She redirected her efforts towards fighting for the powerless, hence the Nobel nomination. A riveting and inspirational read, quite unlike any Iranian memoir to come before, said reviewer Emily Braunstein; it also works as a readable popular modern history of Iran.

MY HOLY WAR, by Jonathan Raban (Picador, \$29.99). A compilation of 17 engaging political and cultural think-pieces by the veteran writer and traveller, this "irregular personal diary" closely examines the evolving new world order since 9/11.

The unifying theme: that the Bush administration's war on terror and imposition of democracy on Iraq is eroding democracy in the US, where a surveillance society is being constructed. Raban insists he is not a political journalist, said reviewer Mark Peters, but he is inarguably a compelling prose stylist.

MY LIVES, by Edmund White (Bloomsbury, \$35). A revelation of his own masochism, this shows a different White from earlier books: no longer the beautiful charmer, he is "old, fat, winded, impotent most of the time, hairy and with big breasts". Despite the shocks, put-downs and name-dropping, it's not all about sexual exploits, though, said reviewer Peter Wells. White's writing is consistently direct, fascinating in its perceptions about human behaviour. Writing about his work on Jean Genet, White argues that homosexuality was crucial to the modern novel's development because it led, among other things, to the "reinvention of love".

PURPLE HEART, by Ta'afuli Andrew Fiu (Random House, \$27.99). Fiu emigrated to New Zealand from Samoa with his family in 1970 at the age of five, and the early part of his autobiography is redolent both with memories of a Ponsonby childhood and the culture shock of adjusting to a new way of life. Untreated rheumatic fever led to five open-heart surgery operations (so far), but as Fiu traces his personal turmoil, says reviewer David Eggleton, his touch is light – and though sometimes wry, he's never self-pitying; rather, he celebrates the human comedy. The

book is also something of a multicultural festival, with a vast cast of relatives.

A READING DIARY: A Year of Favourite Books, by Alberto Manguel (Canongate, \$36.95). In 2002, Argentinian novelist Manguel spent a year re-reading his favourite books and kept a diary about it. The result: a quaint jumble in which he reviews the books while throwing in quotes, travel anecdotes, stories about his carpenter and lists of trivia, eg, mad scientists and his favourite cities. The work also serves as a mini-diary of a year when the US invaded Iraq. Neither smug nor self-serving, said reviewer Paula Morris – Manguel knows what delights him may not delight others – this marvellous little book may persuade you to broaden your own reading list.

TERRA INCOGNITO, by Douglas Wright (Penguin, \$35). Death and Wright are on intimate terms in this book, wrote reviewer Philip Matthews – the book opens with a wrenching description of the dancer's suicide attempt – and there are memorable scenes from a hospice for the HIV-positive. There is the same kind of mesmerising intimacy as in Wright's *Ghost Dance*; an incredible book describing a morbid and fascinating journey.

VIBRANT WITH WORDS: The letters of Ursula Bethell, selected and edited by Peter Whiteford (VUP, \$49.95). Beautifully arranged and edited, with notes so easy to read that they seem a continuation of the text, these letters are revelatory in the way Thomas Jefferson considered letters to be: the only full and genuine journal of a person's life. With

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