

The Shifting Sands of Non-Fiction, Literature and Fiction in Late Postmodernity

by [Pedro Blas González](#) (January 2025)

Popular imagination is more ready to grasp the tail of a dog or the knob of a cane than any philosophy. –Honoré de Balzac

I recently submitted a book review/essay to a magazine. The review is about the latest novel of a leading French writer. However, an editor informed me that they only review non-fiction books. There's nothing wrong with that. I read non-fiction books. I've even published a few. I figured they have a valid reason for doing so.

While I find the magazine's preference for non-fiction limiting, I realized afterwards that they are affiliated with a think tank that specializes in non-fiction books of a social/political nature. I should have paid closer attention to the type of writing they publish. Though, looking through some of the titles of the books they review and the articles they publish, mundane, sterile and boring came to mind.

Ideological Affectation in Non-Fiction

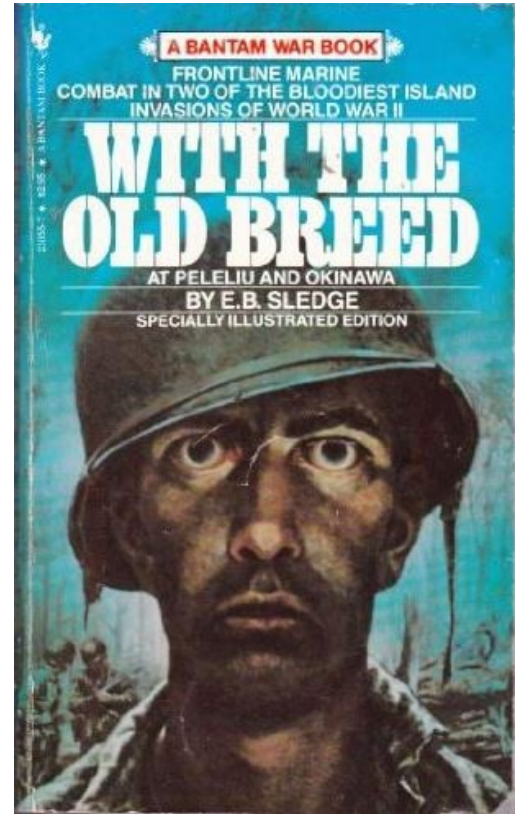
It later dawned on me, through a process of vivid visualization, that the alleged fixes, correctives and 'theories' that many non-fiction books offer to

social/political and moral/spiritual problems of man, society and the world, at least judging by our late postmodern standards, are at best one-dimensional, at worst, oblivious to the metaphysical underpinning of these problems.

I already mentioned that most non-fiction published today on social/political topics is abysmally boring and stale, as five-day old bread. Imagination is not a staple of people in late postmodernity. That is to say, many non-fiction books are reminiscent of locked-room mystery novels, minus the animated detection.

The problem, if I can label it as such, is that non-fiction books on social/political topics more often than not fail at what non-fiction books should deliver: explication and augmentation of the subject matter. Authors of non-fiction books should illuminate readers. This problem is compounded, truly acerbated when non-fiction books of a social/political bearing are solely interested in supplying readers with an ideological social/political vision of man as a servant of the modern state. Ideological reductionism does not have to be explicit, though. This is the timely and forgettable downfall of most non-fiction books; a condition that disqualifies most scholastic academic non-fiction works today.

Effective non-fiction books that address technical aspects of a subject do so by extracting the essence, that is, the nature of the subject in question, placing it in a petri dish, as it were, in order to analyze it. This entails that writers of non-fiction books should possess a solid grasp and clear understanding of their subject matter. This is a question of thoughtfulness. Ideally, illumination and inspiration ought to be the purpose of writing non-fiction books.



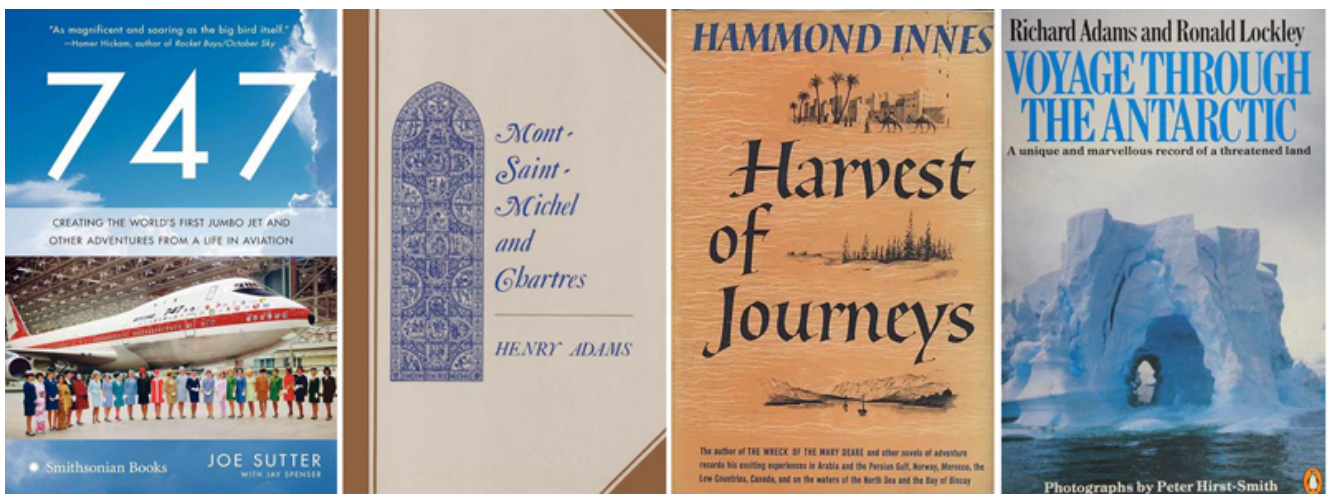
For instance, Eugene B. Sledge's 1981 memoir *With the Old Breed: At Peleliu and Okinawa* chronicles the young marine's horrific experience during World War II. Sledge eschews any romance about war: "As I strolled the streets of Mobile, civilian life seemed so strange. People rushed around in a hurry about seemingly insignificant things. Few seemed to realize how blessed they were to be free and untouched by the horrors of war."

Another instructive example of an effective non-fiction writer is Joe Sutter, the engineer that designed the Boeing 747. Sutter offers a technical and enlightening look at the marvel that is the jumbo jet. He wrote *747: Creating the World's First Jumbo Jet and Other Adventures from a Life in Aviation* to chronicle the development of this beautiful behemoth. When we consider the near miracle that this colossal, yet graceful flying machine signifies for modernity, do we come to appreciate Sutter and Boeing's painstaking undertaking.

Remaining on the topic of adventure, what a joy it is to read Henry Adams' historical and artistic portrayal of the mind-set

and Catholic values of the people who conceived and built medieval cathedrals. Adams' monumental *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* is a literary gem that goes a long way in explaining the nature and vision of Catholicism, especially devotion to Mary.

British novelist Hammond Innes' classic 1960 travelogue *Harvest of Journeys* brings the same literary flair to travel books that John Dos Passos delivers in *Easter Island*. Richard Adams, writer of *Watership Down* and *Shardik*, and the ornithologist Ronald Lockley, render an inspired description of the birds and wildlife of Antarctica in *Voyage Through the Antarctic*.



While the aforementioned books are fine examples of the informative nature of the best that non-fiction has to offer, these books never stoop down to the level of social/political ideology. The non politicization of non-fiction books is a formidable quality that separates readable books, which thoughtful readers appreciate, from their ideological counterparts.

One glaring problem with non-fiction books in late postmodernity, compared to non-fiction published in a previous age, is that imagination has been stripped to a bare minimum. Ideology has taken its place. With this, also goes literary aptitude. This is owed to late postmodernism's Marxist-driven notion that 'all is political.'

Imagination, and awe and wonder, especially when applied to cultural, artistic and literary non-fiction, enable the subject matter of a book to be presented in a disinterested manner. This approach is discouraged for social/political and spiritual/moral questions in our radicalized milieu because it does not advance an ideological conception of man as a servant of the state.

To counter the continued dominance of radicalized ideology in late postmodernity, social/political and spiritual/moral questions must be addressed on philosophical terms. That is, in a manner that pays respect to philosophical anthropology. This, in turn, necessitates that effective writers of non-fiction books turn against ideology, if they are to make inroads and offer a diligent and disinterested contribution to their subject matter.

Thought and life, in addition to the creative process, must ultimately respect and address philosophical anthropology, no matter how much ideological critics will reprimand and censor this approach. Christian humanism in the Renaissance understood this.

What is man? This question informs everything that homo sapiens do. Yet, this realization does not mean that man must ascertain this truism on a self-conscious level at all times. It does mean that human life must be addressed and treated in a genuinely humanistic, not ideological manner.

Our late postmodern ideological age is anti-humanistic because it castrates aspects of human life that are not political. Late postmodernity has abandoned concerns that address the nature of man. This leaves late postmodern man existentially vacuous, disoriented and psychologically perturbed, in addition to asphyxiating in a vacuum of meaning and purpose that must be filled somehow. But with what? Ideology?

The cat is out of the bag. Ideologues do not read books.

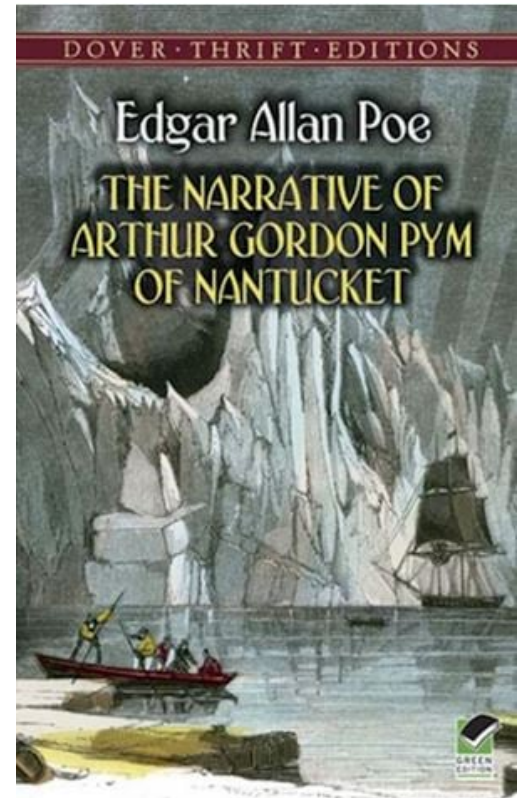
Reading proper, as a disinterested activity that free spirits undertake and relish, is a contemplative activity. A metaphysical/humanistic disinterested view of man in the cosmos lies outside the purview of ideologues. Ideologues propose social/political 'action' for the sake of power. This has the effect of destabilizing society through the continued corrosion of man's psyche and capacity to ascertain the demands that objective reality makes of us.

Ideological writers and readers of non-fiction, which includes a shameful majority of academics—when they do read—miss the point of writing and reading for understanding, knowledge and enlightenment. This is because radicalized ideologues have a debilitating ideological conception of human reality. This makes their beliefs a house of cards that cannot engage in reading non-fiction, literature and fiction without being motivated by an ideological purpose. This radicalized model of reading is the cancer that dominates education at all levels in late postmodernity.

Literature, Fiction and Readers

Contrary to the latter, thoughtful literary writers of fiction before late postmodernity readily addressed man's nature in ways that most non-fiction writers today ignore or don't suspect. The list of these writers comprises the Western Canon. Consequently, this brings up the problem of literary conventions, in addition to agency and responsibility of readers in late postmodernity.

Thoughtful and intellectually honest writers expect readers to rise to the demands their writing makes on readers. This is one daunting reason why students today, at all levels, do not read. Most importantly, students are incapable of following the logic of entire books. We possess ample statistics that prove this.



Statistics demonstrate that reading is torture for students in late postmodernity. How many people who keep a cellular telephone as an appendage of their body possess the desire, interest, imagination, resolve and staying-power to engage with writers the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Dante, Shakespeare, Cervantes and Melville? Even more daunting, such people cannot even follow the basic propositions made by opinion pieces in newspapers, much less be privy to the horror and claustrophobia of Poe's works, the inductive intricacies of detection in Conan Doyle and Chesterton's satirical, yet joyful wit. This is the sorry state of literacy in late postmodernity.

Few so-called *educated* college graduates today can identify Christian allusions and motifs in the Metaphysical poets and Romanticism. They have never heard of Victorian poets like Tennyson and Browning. They are not even capable of grasping Christian motifs in C.S. Lewis and Tolkien's fiction of adventure.

Why is that? How did this illiterate literary and cultural

knowledge dark age come about? The answer is glaringly simple: Ideologues, academic writers of radicalized, ideological non-fiction books.

When students are made to read with the sole purpose of checking off ideological boxes, they miss the redemptive power of literature and fiction altogether. As it stands, college graduates are conditioned to become ideologues. Most of them don't even suspect this.

Not ironically, college graduates have taken literary and cultural illiteracy to unprecedented heights in late postmodernity. That is, they have been conditioned to turn against the Western canon by the radicalized non-fiction writers that have given us de-construction and other ideological aberrations.

As an example of this, let us take the 1975 and subsequent Penguin Classics editions of Edgar Allan Poe's only novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Poe's novel is a mixture of adventure and discovery of the unknown. In typical Poe fashion, he employs edge-of-the-seat horror. The literary critic and academic Harold Beaver's introduction to the book turns Poe's novel into minced meat through obsessive, ideological projection that relies on psychologizing and psychoanalysis. Beaver was credited with being a precursor of French de-constructionism. His introduction mangles the unique themes of Poe's novel by infecting the plot with that platitudinous catch word, 'racism.' Beaver put Melville's *Moby Dick* through the same radical ideological meat grinder by sexualizing the close-knit bond that whalers had with each. After reading these ideologically highjacked

HONORÉ DE BALZAC



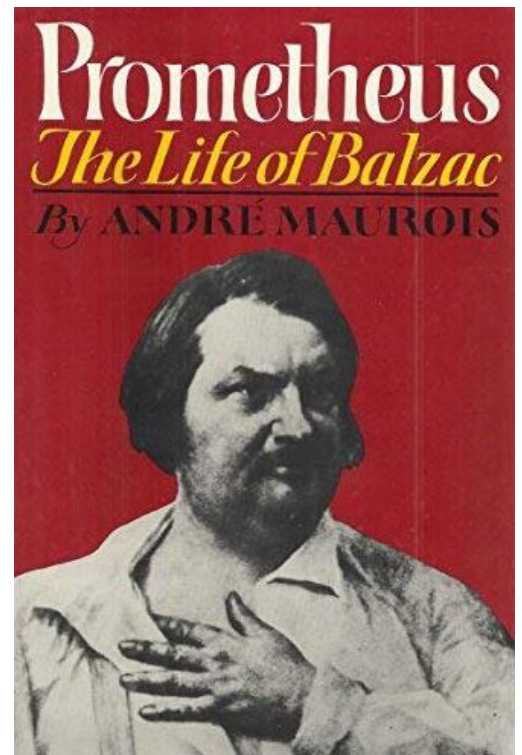
LA COMÉDIE
HUMAINE

introductions to classic books, what woke, Marxist indoctrinated, functionally illiterate college graduate in late postmodernity would care to read these works?

Enlightened Literature and Fiction

Thoughtful readers and writers of non-fiction, Literature and fiction in late postmodernity must take a page from Adam Smith's laissez faire economic principle—excuse the pun—and apply it to reading and writing. That is, Smith's idea that minimal government and intervention in economics—hands off, he calls this—is the best economic policy. This can serve as a corrective to the blight that has taken over reading and writing in late postmodernity.

Literature and fiction deliver readers to untold imagination that appropriates and organizes the essences that inform human existence. Literature and fiction enable us to grasp the nature of human reality. This means that self-respecting literature and fiction, which can enjoy a long shelf life, must remain disinterested.



One final observation. Honoré de Balzac's *La Comédie humaine* (*The Human Comedy*) is the human condition portrayed through fiction, somewhat akin to Wagner's operatic *gesamtkunstwerk* of color, sound, literary and philosophical themes. Balzac's mammoth work comprises 91 finished works and 46 unfinished. Balzac's monumental work presents just about every facet of

human nature, and how this appropriates human reality.

Can a non-ideological reader of Balzac imagine a writer having more fun than Balzac debunking affectation and hypocrisy? Can a radical ideologue even comprehend the literary merit of Balzac's larger than life oeuvres littéraires?

How many writers are up to the task of writing an insightful biography of Balzac, a man who loved women, many women, and squandered his finances, though he was a master of realism? Writers motivated by Ideological virtue signaling, psychologizing and psychoanalysis need not apply. Such a work of admirable non-fiction is Andre Maurois' 1965 *Prometheus: The Life of Balzac*, a spectacular tribute to a giant of literature.

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Pedro Blas González is Professor of Philosophy in Florida. He earned his doctoral degree in Philosophy at DePaul University in 1995. Dr. González has published extensively on leading Spanish philosophers, such as Ortega y Gasset and Unamuno. His books have included [Unamuno: A Lyrical Essay](#), [Ortega's 'Revolt of the Masses' and the Triumph of the New Man](#), [Fragments: Essays in Subjectivity, Individuality and Autonomy](#) and [Human Existence as Radical Reality: Ortega's Philosophy of Subjectivity](#). He also published a translation and introduction of José Ortega y Gasset's last work to appear in English, "Medio siglo de Filosofía" (1951) in [Philosophy Today](#) Vol. 42 Issue 2 (Summer 1998). His most recent book is [Philosophical Perspective on Cinema](#).

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