

**7+2 MUST-HAVE READS FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF**

**7+2 books that belong in your library and close to your heart.**

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## 7+2 MUST-HAVE READS FOR YOUR BOOKSHELF

7+2 books that belong in your library and close to your heart.

During my classes at NYIT School of Architecture and Design, New York, in the first semester of 2021, I must have filled my students' heads with the names of so many books that some of them asked me to give them an essential reading list both for their professional career and their future lives. I might add here that I enjoyed those classes as much, if not more, than they did, with Maria Perbellini as our wonderful Dean. And now, coming up with this list of essential books seems like a very fitting way to round off that unforgettable course.

I made another similar list for future architecture students many years ago which I included in a book I wrote for children: *I want to be an architect*. The book, beautifully edited in English by AMAG in 2000, was later edited in English-Spanish by Nancy Olnick and Giorgio Spanu, with beautiful drawings by Aya Waterhouse. As Francis Bacon stated with characteristic clarity in his *Essays*: "Some books are to be tasted, others to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested". So this list, which I now recommend to architects and to those who are not yet architects, is made up of books from the latter group, those which, Bacon continues, "are to be read wholly, and with diligence and attention".

All of the books I have selected are short texts that say so much that they are not only meant to be read once, but re-read again and again for the rest of your lives. That is what I do. So I recommend that you reserve a small space on your bookshelves for these essential books, for these treasures. You will thank me for it.

Yesterday I was talking to one of my regular booksellers, Jesús from the Pérez Galdós bookshop in Madrid, about Mendel the Bibliophile, the unforgettable character created by Stefan Zweig. As soon as I got home I re-read the story and enjoyed it again like a child. Zweig never disappoints, which is why he is essential.

## 1- WHAT IS A CLASSIC?

T.S. Eliot

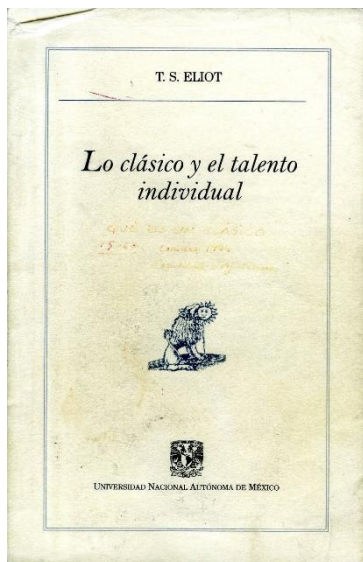
As a fond admirer of the poet T.S. Eliot, I was thrilled to have picked up at a street book table on Broadway an almost antiquarian copy of Faber & Faber's 1944 first edition of *What is a classic?* With its hard, cardboard cover and bearded laid paper, it is a joy to look at and feel its velvety touch.

And soon afterwards, in May 2017, I received the gift from my friend César Caicoya of a wonderful translation of that same book into Spanish by Juan Carlos Rodríguez, published by the UNAM in Mexico. A real gem. "In our age, when men seem more than ever prone to confuse wisdom with knowledge, and knowledge with information, and try to solve problems of life in terms of engineering, there is coming into existence a new kind of provincialism, not of space, but of time."

The word "provincial" is translated into Spanish as "provinciano", which is even more pejorative.

Eliot here unravels the concept of the classic in such a clear and convincing way that, although he is logically referring to literature, it could very well be applied to architecture – such is the universal nature of his reasoning!

On account of the brevity of the text in question, this Spanish edition entitled "The Classical and the Individual Talent", includes the Spanish translation of *WHAT IS A CLASSIC?*, delivered by the poet on 16 October 1944 as the Presidential Address to the Virgil Society of London. The second, *TRADITION AND INDIVIDUAL TALENT* is also a delightful, essential text.



LO CLÁSICO Y EL TALENTO INDIVIDUAL

T.S. Eliot

Ed. UNAM Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 2013

ISBN 978-970-32-1506-5

Traducción estupenda de Juan Carlos Rodríguez

Claro que, todavía es mejor el original en inglés de la primera edición, de la que tengo un ejemplar maravilloso.

WHAT IS A CLASSIC?

An address delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October 1944

FABER & FABER LIMITED Ed.

No tiene ISBN ni falta que hace.

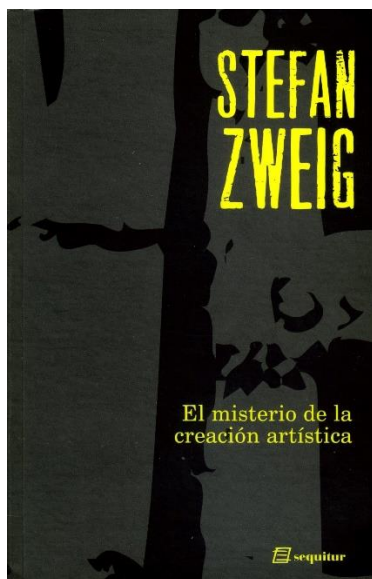
## 2- THE SECRET OF ARTISTIC CREATION

Stefan Zweig

In 2008, I received a small book with a very generous dedication as a gift from Raúl Martínez, the last scholarship holder to have been in my studio. The tiny volume contained four texts by Zweig, beginning with the one that gave the book its title: The Mystery of Artistic Creation. I later learned that it was a lecture he had given in Spanish, in 1940 in Rosario, Argentina, at the university which this year has made me Doctor Honoris Causa.

It began with: "Of all the mysteries of the universe, none is deeper than that of creation". And it concluded with a resounding: "I am not aware of any greater delight and satisfaction than in noting that it is also given to man to create everlasting values, and that we are eternally united to the Eternal through our supreme effort on earth: through art".

Essential. And so began my voyage of discovery of Stefan Zweig, all of whose works I have read and enjoyed, all of them, including his Mendel the Bibliophile, which I also take the opportunity to recommend here.



EL MISTERIO DE LA CREACIÓN ARTÍSTICA

Stefan Zweig

Ed. Sequitur, Madrid 2007

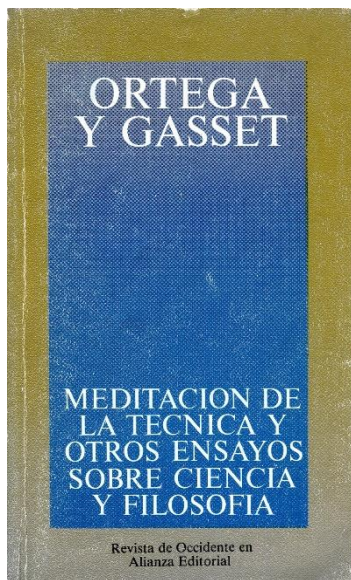
ISBN 978-84-95363-35-0

### 3- THE MYTH OF HUMANS OUTSIDE TECHNICS

Ortega y Gasset

Ortega's splendid text is usually published with his Meditations on Technique, although I prefer the shorter and more luminous text, where Ortega tells us: "Man uses and wears out technical instruments". "But in the face of artistic objects, man's work is not so simple. He does not wear them out, much less wear them out. He remains in front of them". It also includes the famous saying: "Clarity is the courtesy of the philosopher".

The Myth of Humans outside Technics is usually accompanied by the equally worth reading article on the Darmstadt Conference, 1951, in which Ortega also dares to talk about architecture.



MEDITACIÓN DE LA TÉCNICA Y OTROS ENSAYOS

Ortega y Gasset

Revista de Occidente en Alianza Editorial, Madrid 1982

ISBN 84-206-4121-9

Contiene EL MITO DEL HOMBRE ALLENDE LA TÉCNICA y  
EN TORNO AL COLOQUIO DE DARMSTADT, 1951

Ed. Alianza, Madrid 2014

ISBN 978-84-206-8613-4

#### 4- PROTREPTICUS

Aristotle 384-322 B.C.

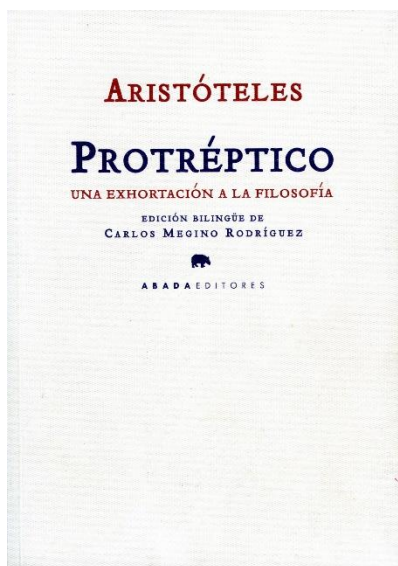
It is difficult to explain how, at this point in the third millennium, this unparalleled Aristotelian text has not been found.

In front of me is Carlos Megino's 2006 edition published by Abada. Apparently, there is a 1981 edition by the Argentine Alberto Buela, but it is not even cited by his peers. And the Argentinian is annoyed, and rightly so. It is said that Cicero was inspired by this *Protrepticus* when writing his *Hortensius*. As was Marcus Aurelius (121-180 A.D.) for his *Meditations*, as aphoristic as Aristotle's text. Marcus Aurelius admits it without a trace of embarrassment.

Fragment CX 74

"For understanding God is within us " (whether it was Hermocritus or Anaxagoras who said it) and "because mortal life participates in a God" it is necessary to philosophize, or else to leave this world and say goodbye to living, for all the rest is nothing but frivolity and stupidity.

It is said that the Aristotelian Protrepticus served as inspiration to Marcus Aurelius for his *Meditations*. And also Cicero for his *Hortensius*.



PROTRÉPTICO

<https://www.revistadefilosofia.org/30-01.pdf>

Traducción y comentario de Santiago González Escudero

ESTUDIOS GRIEGOS

Alberto Buela

Ediciones Theoria, Buenos Aires 1998, 118 págs.

PROTRÉPTICO

Aristóteles

Ed. Abada, Madrid 2017

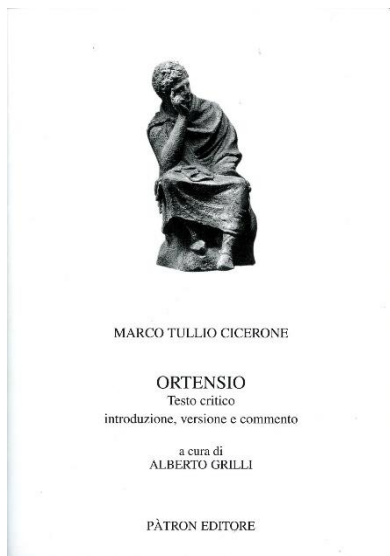
ISBN 978-84-96258-85-3

## 5- HORTENSIUS

Cicero

On my desk sits an Ortensio in Italian, the Hortensius, which after very lengthy research is the only version that I have been able to get my hands on. Cicero is always clear and to the point. As with Aristotle's Protrepticus, it is quite incredible that the original is lost to history.

For me, as one who is addicted to St Augustine, this book is of the utmost interest, since the man from Hippo claims that his encounter with this text was key to his conversion. Ever since I learnt this, I have been searching high and low for a copy of it to see if it produces a similar change in me.



HORTENSIUS

ORTENSIO (en italiano)

Cicerón

Pàtron Editore, Bologna 2010

ISBN 978-88-555-3086-6

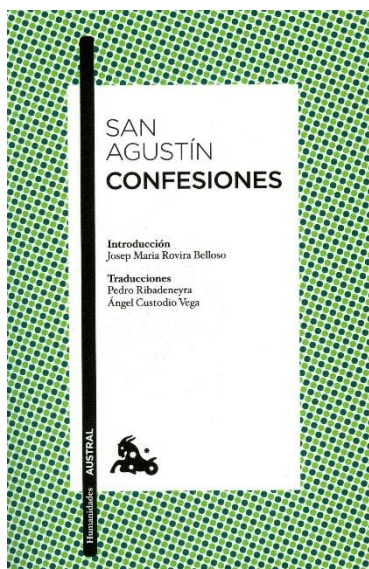
## 6- CONFESSIONS

Saint Augustine

“You have made us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in You” – the emphatic words of Saint Augustine in the opening lines of the text. To read The Confessions is a true delight in every sense of the word. Whether you read it all at once or in small sections, the fluidity of his prose always provides maximum enjoyment.

His “Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You!” was one of the focal points of my acceptance speech as an academican at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando in Madrid in 2014. Several people asked me afterwards where I got such a beautiful text. Here now is the full transcription of chapter 27 of Book X:

For behold, You were within, and I without, and there did I seek You; I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made. You were with me, but I was not with You. Those things kept me far from You, which, unless they were in You, were not. You called, and cried aloud, and forced open my deafness. You gleamed and shone, and chased away my blindness. You exhaled odours, and I drew in my breath and do pant after You. I tasted, and do hunger and thirst. You touched me, and I burned for Your peace.



CONFESIONES DE UN PECADOR  
San Agustín  
Ed. Taurus / Santillana, Madrid 2012  
ISBN 978-84-306-0928-4

CONFESIONES  
San Agustín  
Ed. Austral / Madrid 2021  
ISBN 978-84-08-17605-3



## 7- MEDITATIONS

Marcus Aurelius

As of September 2021, I have obtained up to 80 versions of the Meditations of Emperor Marcus Aurelius: 31 in Spanish, 23 in English, 8 in Italian, 6 in French, 1 in German, 1 in Portuguese, 1 in Croatian and even 1 in Chinese. And a few others. One of the Italian versions that can be consulted in the Vatican Library also has the text in Greek, the original language in which the text was written. My most recent acquisition is in Swedish.

Anyone might think that I am a linguist or a philosopher, or a bookworm or someone with a superlative culture. Nothing of the sort. I am a simple architect who loves the extraordinary beauty that human beings are capable of creating. And one who recognizes that this text by Marcus Aurelius is a thing of great beauty.

And in my customary visit to the Prado Museum, today I saw a head of Marcus Aurelius in Classical Sculpture room 71, almost hidden away on the ground floor. Until recently, there was another, better one in the main Gallery, next to that of Hadrian.

MARCO AUR  
ELIO · MEDIT  
ACIONES · T  
ODO MI SE  
R SE REDU  
CE A ESTO:  
LA CARNE,  
EL ESPÍRIT  
U, LA FACU  
LTAD RECTO  
RA · TAURUS  
GREAT IDEAS

MEDITACIONES

Marco Aurelio

Ed. Taurus / Santillana, Madrid 2012

ISBN 978-84-306-0103-5

ISBN 7884-16-429288

## FINALE

Today, as I finish writing about these recommended, or rather must-have treasures, I have before me all the books mentioned, with the exception of Cicero's Hortensius (I only have the Ortensio in Italian). Almost all of them are rather worn out. And the thing is that when reading books, paper books, some of us also occasionally caress them and, from time to time we even shed a tear or two over them, tears that escape us during moments of profound emotion.

Also, in recent years I have acquired the bad habit of underlining my books in red, with a felt-tipped Pilot 4. It helps me a lot not only to fix my attention further where possible, but also when rereading them to remind me where I focused my attention before. I must admit it's a bad habit. But it works.

But, do as I do, keep these books on that special shelf like the jewels they are. They are worth so much more than what they cost.

Both Aristotle's Protrepticus and Cicero's Hortensius are texts lost in history that, although essential reading, continue to appear in worthy but patchy versions that are not easy to assimilate.

I cherish the hope that the originals of both books will appear before too long, or at least a synthesis-translation that will be able to bear fruits similar to those produced by both Marcus Aurelius and St. Augustine.

## CONTINUATION

In order not to stop recommending to my friends and my students books with which to learn and enjoy a lot, I dare to continue.

From 2 books that deserve it: Francis Bacon's book with the text "Of Studies", and Heinrich Böll's Irish Diary. Two other first-rate gems, to all of Homer.

I remember the day when, at the beginning of the pandemic, on the occasion of my confinement, I decided to read Don Quixote in one sitting, from beginning to end. What a good decision! Not only did I enjoy it enormously, but I discovered then that Cervantes was talking about the Pantheon in Rome. And so many other things!

## 7+1- OF STUDIES

Francis Bacon

Bacon, the philosopher, has gone down in history, among other things, for his Essays. For essays, those of Francis Bacon. In *Of Studies*, a short text contained within his collection *Of Wisdom for a Man's Self* he tells us:

"Some books are for tasting, some for devouring, and a few for chewing and digesting"; that is, "some books are for reading only in part; some for reading not too carefully; and a few for reading wholly and diligently and attentively." More clear, water. And the fact is that our Bacon, besides being a wise man, was very pedagogical.

DE LA SABIDURÍA EGOÍSTA.

Francis Bacon

Ed. Taurus / Santillana, Madrid 2012

ISBN 978-84-306-0100-4

## 7+2- IRISH JOURNAL

Heinrich Böll

When I was a little boy, I read Böll's *Billiards at Nine Thirty* by Böll. And I enjoyed it very much. Now, after so many years, in good time! I discover this Irish Diary, which deserves to be read, both for its form and its content. A precious thing.

DIARIO IRLANDÉS

Heinrich Böll

Ed. Plataforma, Barcelona, 2015

## 10 BASIC BOOKS WORTH READING

I want to be an architect

I might surprise you with a list that includes not only books on architecture but also features works on other subjects. In my case, in my house, there are more books of Poetry than Architecture and as you can imagine, my collection of books on Architecture is quite large!

I think that apart from being necessary, it is indispensable to read books not just about Architecture. I've made a short list of twelve books which I would invite you to read and enjoy.

The Little Prince

Antoine de Saint Exupery

Even if you have already read it, read it again with an architect's mind.

Letters to a Young Poet

Rainer María Rilke

Enjoy.

A Christmas Memory

Truman Capote

Go back and climb up to the tree-house with the main characters.

Eupalinos or, The architect

Paul Valery

You probably never thought of an architect in this way?

Modern Architecture: A Critical History

Kenneth Frampton

Basic information from someone who is passionate about Architecture.

Le Corbusier

Willy Boesiger

A basic work on the maestro.

Mies van der Rohe

Werner Blaser

A simple work on the other maestro.

Louis I. Kahn

Christian Norberg Schulz

He was an exemplary architect.

La Idea Construida

Alberto Campo Baeza

I have tried to be clear and think it may help you.

Errata

George Steiner

Magnificent. You will enjoy it.

Meditation on Technique

José Ortega y Gasset

Clarity is the courtesy of the philosopher, Ortega said. And here it is in plenty.

Sonnets

William Shakespeare

Marvellous