

VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ: FROM STORYTELLER TO SOLDIER OF THE PEN

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ABSTRACT. Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) is recognized as one of Spain's most famous Naturalist writers. Although, his use of the purported objectivity of that movement in an attempt to affect societal change has long been recognized, more recent criticism tends to minimize much of the Naturalist undercurrent in his works with an eye toward reconciling his writing similarities/differences with more "canonical" authors while demonstrating that his writings were much more than a simple attempt to influence, or react to, political ideologies. While Blasco's popularity and fortunes as the first millionaire Spanish author garnered him both fame from the masses and animosity from his highbrow contemporaries, it is my argument that Blasco's narratives demonstrate at least four distinct changes in writing style for the express purpose of creating for the reader a different type of experience of literature. Those involve the Valencian cycle, the social novels, the European/WWI novels, and at least one foray into the realm of the incipient—and popular—detective fiction genre. An examination of a wide-ranging gamut of Blasco's works, then, reveal Blasco as an author who both reacts to and evolves as a creator of literary experiences.

KEY WORDS: Blasco Ibáñez, detective fiction, Naturalism, social justice, thesis novels

Introduction

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867-1928) has long been recognized as one of Spain's most famous writers with his most highly-recognized commercial successes being bookended by the early Naturalist novels of the Valencian cycle and the later Hollywood screenplays/adaptations, in particular, those related to World War I. His appeal across so many styles of writings, countries, languages (through translations in more than a dozen languages), and reader literacy levels is almost without parallel for a Spanish author. Gilbert Paolini reports that "in a 1924 contest sponsored by the *International Book Revue* of New York to determine the ten most popular writers in the United States, England, and Australia, Blasco Ibáñez placed second to H. G. Wells" (Paolini 1993: 216), and Juan Carlos Laviana, among others, states that

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Blasco is “el escritor español de mayor proyección internacional después de Cervantes” (“the Spanish writer of greatest international impact after Cervantes”) (Laviana 2017). Such success and popularity undoubtedly owe themselves to an ability by the author to connect with his audience, that is, an ability to create an “experience of literature” for a large number and broad array of individual readers. Often ignored by critics of the author, however, is the fact that such long-lasting and wide-spread success (even if one considers only his most popular novels today) by necessity also reflects an evolving literary style which transcends the preferences and desires of only a particular time, space, and/or type of audience. David Rhead and José Marín note that “Blasco Ibáñez is the most translated Spanish writer of all time after Cervantes and 17 of his books have been made into films. *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* spent twelve months at the top of the US bestsellers list in 1916 and 1917 and, to Blasco Ibáñez’s great personal delight, outsold even the Bible in the middle of the Great War. The novel has had four separate screen adaptations” (Rhead and Marín 2017).

Telling the Story of Valencia

Blasco’s own first experience of literature was a love affair dating from his youth. Juan Luis Alborg relates that

En su casa había muchos libros, porque su padre, aficionado a la lectura, solía comprarlos, pero, además, el famoso editor Cabrerizo, pariente de la familia, se los regalaba con frecuencia. Blasco comenzó muy pronto a leer novelas, que se llevaba a clase escondidas entre los libros de texto. (At his home there were a lot of books because his father, a reading enthusiast, used to buy them, but, in addition, the famous editor Cabrerizo, a family relative, frequently gave them to them. Blasco began very early in life to read novels that he carried to class hidden among the textbooks.) (Alborg 1999: 455)

Camille Pitollet additionally remarks that even while still in school “Il ne se passé pas de jour qu’il ne consacre de trois à quatre heures à la lecture” (“not a day passed in which he does not dedicate three or four hours to reading”) (Pitollet 1921: 9). This love affair and addiction to reading would quickly convert itself into the active art form of creative writing, something that demanded Blasco’s attention even when other duties called. Laviana, in fact, quotes the novelist himself as stating that

Si hubiera nacido en un país salvaje, sin literatura, sin novelas, sin lenguaje escrito, habría hecho por las mañanas varias leguas de marcha para llegar a la cabaña del vecino más próximo y decirle: “Compañero, vengo a contarle una historia muy interesante que se me ocurrió anoche...” Yo he nacido para contar historias. Siento la necesidad de crear novelas, tan imperiosamente como necesito comer y beber. (If I had been born in a wild country, without literature, with-

out novels, without written language, I would have taken a walk every morning of several leagues distance to get to the nearest neighbor's cabin and say to him: "Friend, I come to tell you a very interesting story that occurred to me last night..." I was born to tell stories. I feel the need to create novels, as irresistibly as I need to eat and drink.) (Laviana 2017)

While early in life Blasco wrote more than novels—including poems, short stories, and drama—he would eventually repudiate as unworthy of preservation almost all that body of work written prior to 1894, the year when the first of the six Valencian cycle novels appeared. This series, written between 1894 and 1902, propelled him to his first tastes of international acclaim. More specifically, it is the 1901 French translation of *La barraca* (1898) in the *Revue de Paris* that leads to his "rapidly gaining a reading-public" (Keniston 1903: 623) beyond the Spanish borders.

Interestingly, however, Blasco's experience with, and manipulation of, the print medium was already well established. In fact, because of his desire to reach the common man with literature as well as to promote his own political inclinations, in 1883—having just recently completed his 16th birthday—he founded and published a weekly newspaper in Valencia entitled *El Miguelete*, notably subtitled "Revista de Literatura", which underwent a name change in the third publication and ceased publication entirely after two more subsequent issues. In late 1893, Blasco would work for a period of time as director for *La Bandera Federal*, a newspaper recently founded by an acquaintance, Remigio Herrero. In November, 1894, Blasco would create his own newspaper, *El Pueblo*, and in the first issue (November 12) appears the first entry of the serialized novel *Arroz y tartana*, which consumes approximately one-third of the lower section of page one, below the section heading "FOLLETÍN". In this inaugural edition of *El Pueblo* also appears an editorial introduction to the periodical, "Presentación", in which it is stated—supposedly written by Blasco—that "nuestro lema [es] ¡Por la República y para la República!" ("our motto [is] By the Republic and for the Republic!") (Ibáñez 1894: 1). Reflective of this, then, is a political bent to the entire newspaper from the very first issue, even in the two creative writing entries contained therein, the other piece of literary fiction being a Spanish translation, "El higo y el perezoso", of a short story by Alphonse Daudet highlighted on the first page by a graphic illustration of the French author himself. Tellingly, Daudet was most recognized for being a Provençal novelist, often associated with the naturalist Emile Zola, and whom Olin Moore points out as one who constantly demonstrated a "sentiment of pity for the weak and the oppressed, he takes many of his heroes from among the indigent classes" (Moore 1916: 169). Given the highlighting of the French author and story in the newspaper, then, it should be no surprise that *Arroz y tartana*, as the inaugural volume of Blasco's Valencian cycle of

novels, also demonstrates some of those same characteristics: a regional (almost costumbrista) focus, a naturalist technique, a sentimental appeal favoring the marginalized elements of society, and a sense of a call for social justice, elements common throughout the entire Valencian cycle. As Joan Garrabou notes:

Entendre Blasco Ibáñez és entendre, calibrar i desfibrar analíticament aquesta sèrie de retaules de la realitat d'un país i d'un poble, pintats amb una tècnica naturalista, que tenia molt, per cert, de fotogràfica i també una mica de distorsiva o, dit d'una altra manera, de selectiva (en el sentit de fixar l'atenció sobre els aspectos més tràgics, sórdids i inclements de l'existència). (Understanding Blasco Ibáñez is to understand, to measure and to deconstruct analytically that series of altarpieces of the reality of a country and a people painted with a naturalistic technique which was very much, by the way, photographic and also a bit distortive or, said in another manner, selective (in the sense of fixing one's attention on the most tragic, sordid and inclement aspects of existence). (Garrabou 1995: 27).

In this Valencian series, Blasco uses a formulaic pattern, perhaps in part because many of these were originally written as serialized novels for his newspaper *El Pueblo*. Blasco would give up directorship of the newspaper in fall 1904 (Platero 1999: 117). Interestingly, the serialization of the novel would in itself also represent a radical change in Blasco's creative mode since a serialized novel was more similar to multiple, individual entries than the long, sustained narratives of his earlier endeavors. Four of the six have ten chapters, with *Arroz y tartana* having twelve and *Entre naranjos* (1900) having sixteen. Perhaps *Entre naranjos* breaks the mold so much from the other Valencian novels due to its strongly autobiographical undercurrents. For a more detailed analysis of such, see Chapter 2 of Eduardo Zamacois's *Mis contemporáneos 1* (Ibáñez 1910). In any case, the standard technique is to begin the novel *in media res*, with what would chronologically be one of the last chapters of the story before going back, in Chapter 2, to tell the pre-history, or events which both give an important historical/ sociological background and foretell how the current events being related—from this point forward in a chronological fashion—are going to play out in chapter 10. Many of the characters' names are the same or remarkably similar in four of the six narratives. Each work, as well, takes as a protagonist a particular character type caught up in the passions of the moment who makes a fateful decision that results in the death of her/his dreams, if not her/his own literal demise. While the author's employing of a formulaic paradigm may have had commercial advantages—newspaper subscribers and book purchasers were already familiar with the work's structure and therefore knew what to expect—such also allowed Blasco to rapidly finish consecutive portions of the novels in time for the next “Folletín” in his newspaper and to maintain a

certain parallel structure throughout the series, with a resultant stability, if not increase, in readership and sales.

Blasco's use of a recognized, and recognizable, paradigm is not limited to the Valencian series. In fact, it is the very existence of certain elements of commonality that make it possible to categorize his narratives into the four types/styles under discussion in the current essay. Additionally, as I noted in an earlier publication, throughout the author's life, his "treatment of female characters typically follows the outlined formula. The woman is either a suffering, to-be-pitied member of the weaker sex or a manipulative, controlling seductress. Her place in society, stereotypically following the cultural norm of the period, is not that of even a few short years later; her positive value as a role model outside of the home is negligible" (Oxford 2002: 68). In other words, Blasco may have maintained certain recurrent rhetorical devices, but the overall evolution of his works demonstrates an author much more consciously involved in creating literary experiences for an ever widening audience than what would occur out of mere happenstance.

A Conscious Move Toward National Issues

It is, in fact, 1903, when Blasco turns his attention away from Valencia as the focal point for his narrative adventures, and expands his settings to other areas of Spain. Years later, in 1921, he explains:

yo no he escrito más novelas valencianas porque he considerado que estaba el tema agotado. Había hecho la novela de la burguesía de Valencia: *Arroz y Tartana*; yo había pintado la playa y los marineros y los pescadores en *Flor de Mayo*; había hecho *La Barraca*, que es la gente de la huerta; había hecho *Cañas y Barro*; que es la novela de la Albufera; traté de la Valencia histórica, que es la defensa de Sagunto; y después de esto me eché a escribir novelas de otros países, porque no encontré más temas para novela. Tal vez los encuentre las gentes que vendrán después. Yo no encontré más. (I have not written more Valencian novels because I considered the subject to be exhausted. I had made the novel of the Valencian bourgeoisie: *Arroz y Tartana*; I had painted the beach and the sailors and fishermen in *Flor de Mayo*; I had made *La Barraca*, which is the people of the farmland; I had done *Cañas y Barro*, which is the novel of the Albufera; I dealt with historical Valencia, which is the defense of Sagunto; and after that I started writing novels about other countries because I did not find any more themes for a novel. Maybe the people who come later will find them. I did not find any more.) (Ibáñez 1966: 352)

At the same time as Blasco was turning his literary attentions elsewhere, he was also fighting a political internecine fight with a formerly close ally, Rodrigo Soriano, and facing possible Congressional repercussions for his anti-monarchical newspaper article "Al pasar", which relates Blasco's having crossed paths with the young king Alfonso XIII. Out of these experiences,

then, arises a series of novels with an even greater social emphasis related to a much greater geographical area than merely Valencia. *La catedral* (1903) attacks the Church's overpowering, in the author's mind, influence on all of Spanish society. *El intruso* (1904) relates the difficult working conditions the Basque miners face; *La bodega* (1905) criticizes the wine industry's oppression of its workers in Andalusia. *La horda* (1905) relates the Madrid commoners' fight for survival. *La maja desnuda* (1906) relates a poor boy's rise to fame in the Madrid art scene, and his travels across Europe, as an analogy for how humanity is never satisfied with what it achieves, and *Sangre y arena* (1908) is a strong, anti-bullfighting thesis novel that touches the very core of the Spanish psyche of the time.

Even though all of these novels have as a basis a social thesis, it is clear that the author's associations with some of the writers, his contemporaries, who later would become known as the Generation of 98 were beginning to affect his own thoughts/writings even before they themselves published their most important works. Chief influences on the Generation of 98 are a preoccupation for the future of Spain (in particular, Castile), and the philosophies of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer related to, respectively, the will to power and metaphysical voluntarism. Blasco was quite familiar with the works of Unamuno, the chief intellectual/philosopher of the group, for example, and collaborated with him and Eduardo Ortega y Gasset (José's older brother) during the 1920s in publishing and distributing in France and Spain their tabloid *España con Honra* attacking the Monarchy (for more information, see León 2009).

While Blasco may not have explored Nietzsche, Schopenhauer, and Kierkegaard as fully as his Generation of 98 contemporaries, and was disdained by many of them because of his commercial appeal and success as a writer, his concern with the *porvenir de España* (future of Spain) is quite apparent in all of his social novels, and the other philosophical concerns of the Generation of 98 are even more overtly examined, in particular, in his own *La voluntad de vivir* (1907) and *La horda*. (For a more detailed analysis of how Blasco Ibáñez's *La voluntad de vivir* corresponds in various ways to the Generation of 98 aesthetic, see Oxford 2000, and for a closer examination of *La horda* in relation to Pío Baroja's *La busca*, see Longhurst 2010.) It should also be pointed out that Blasco's use of Naturalism is really not that significantly different from—and could arguably be cited as an antecedent to—Pío Baroja's neonaturalism and Valle-Inclán's esperpento. Interestingly, Eduardo Betoret-París, as far back as 1969, called for a re-examination of Blasco, arguing that “hay mucho en común entre los afanes del Blasco Ibáñez y los de los más distinguidos componentes de la llamada Generación del 98” (“there is much in common between the ambitions of Blasco Ibáñez and

the most distinguished members of the so-called Generation of 98”) (Beto-ret-París 1969: 99).

Soldier of the Pen: the European Great War

In 1909, after a series of talks in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, Blasco begins preparation for a social experiment in Argentina, where he founds two separate colonies for agricultural workers from Valencia, Spain. Ultimately however, the two colonies fail, leaving Blasco at the brink of penury himself and forced to return to Europe. He takes up residence in Paris during the spring of 1914, and when World War I breaks out in July of that same year he begins work as a war correspondent for multiple newspapers, thereby becoming once again financially solvent. After a series of public speeches in France supporting the Allies early in the war, and attempts to do the same in Spain (see Alborg 1999: 738-741), French President Raymond Poincaré convinces Blasco to visit the war front and write a novel supporting the cause. The resultant novel, *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* (1916), then, from its inception represented another change in Blasco’s creation of experiences of literature. This novel, as were the other two novels over the war *Mare Nostrum* (1917) and *Los enemigos de la mujer* (1919), was propagandistic in purpose and nature—not an exposé over various regional character types or attacks on social ills but an effort to convince others to join the Allies’s cause against the Germans. While the novel was only moderately successful in Europe, the 1918 English translation, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, was an immediate sensation; in 1918 alone the publisher E. P. Dutton issued twenty-four separate printings of the first edition with at least half a million copies being sold (Unsworth 2016), and it was the number one bestselling novel in the U.S. the subsequent year. The cinematization of the novel by Hollywood in 1921 led to a wave of popularity for the author and his works in the U.S. A shorter adaptation of the novel had been previously filmed in French during 1916 under the title *Debout les morts!* (The Standing Dead!) Tellingly, Ryan Copping asserts that the popularity of the 1921 movie owed itself to being a “film [that] explains both the trauma and the causes of the war in terms that were palatable to the American audience at the time—the war is both caused by the evil of Germans and by human sin from a Christian perspective” and “The reception of *Four Horseman* indicates that it was a major event in American culture in 1921 and a highly emotional experience for many audiences” (Copping 2016: 1). As Juan Carlos Laviana notes:

Blasco se convirtió en lo que él definía como “un soldado de la pluma”. Su gran best-seller, *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis*, fue un éxito apabullante en Estados Unidos [...] Con esta novela, nació el márketing literario. Paquetes de cigarrillos, ceniceros, pisapapeles, juguetes, jabones o corbatas con motivos de los icónicos cuatro jinetes e incluso con la efigie del escritor convirtieron a “Mister Ibanyés”

en una de las figuras más populares de los años 20. Todo el mundo quería conocerle. El autor era la estrella [...] El cine disparó su popularidad, convertido en estrella él mismo. Su biógrafo Nicolás Reig recuerda que el escritor “presumía de las tiradas de sus obras, no solo por vanidad, sino porque su mayor satisfacción era saber que la historia del incendio de una barraca valenciana, que él había contado a sus compatriotas, seguía emocionando a un ‘farmer’ americano o a un campesino ruso. Por eso se entusiasmó con el cine y decidió escribir novelas cinematográficas viendo la posibilidad de llegar a miles de personas.” (Blasco became what he defined as “a soldier of the pen”. His great best-seller, *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse*, was an overwhelming success in the United States [...] With this novel, literary marketing was born. Packages of cigarettes, ashtrays, paperweights, toys, soaps or ties with motifs of the iconic four horsemen and even with the effigy of the writer turned “Mister Ibanyés” into one of the most popular figures of the 20s. Everyone wanted to meet him. The author was the star [...] The cinema elevated his popularity to that of a star himself. His biographer Nicolás Reig recalls that the writer “boasted of the circulation of his works, not only out of vanity, but because his greatest satisfaction was knowing that the story of the burning of a Valencian farmhouse, which he had told his countrymen, was still moving an American farmer or a Russian peasant. That’s why he became enthusiastic about cinema and decided to write film novels, seeing the possibility of reaching thousands of people.” (Laviana 2017)

If Blasco’s biographer is to be believed, then, the novelist consciously made a deliberate choice to vary his writing style for a reason other than simply literary pleasure; he was endeavoring to create a narrative such that an even greater audience would have a more impactful literary experience. While these particular WWI novels were not originally conceived as film scripts, Blasco’s adaptations of the works to that medium created yet another literary-like experience through film. Notably, Blasco then subsequently turned to some of his previously written novels, adapting them for the cinema as well.

Blasco Ibáñez had sensed early on the potential that movies represented for literary expression, and he had first utilized that medium in 1913, with *Tonto de la huerta* (Fool of the Farmland), an adaptation of his novel *La barraca*. Between then and January 1928 (when he died) or even September 1929, when movies with sound were first projected in Spain, Blasco had eleven other movie scripts/adaptations to his credit, seven of these subsequent to the 1921 *Four Horsemen*. In total, according to the IMDb website, Blasco now has thirty film or TV movie/series credits as writer, one as director and one for archival footage (Vicente n.d.). Obviously, then, Blasco recognized the power of film to stir the masses, to promote more effectively his message, and to create a distinct type of literary experience, but he was ultimately troubled by the restrictive demands that Hollywood placed upon him and his writing, leading him to consider by “the time of his death that the

US was becoming a colonizing [cultural] force in Spain” (Zamostny 2016/17: 148).

That Blasco’s experience with literature involved other developments and changes in—or experimentations with—his writing styles is undeniable. In my essay on early Spanish detective fiction, I detail how Blasco observed the popularity of Robert Louis Stevenson “and a whole group of English detective stories” in early twentieth-century Spain, as well as Gonzalo Jóver’s adaptations of detective fiction to the stage, and decided to try his hand at the genre at well (Oxford 2016/17). “Golpe doble”, published in the 1899 collection of short stories entitled *Cuentos grises*, is the result of that attempt. Further research remains to be conducted concerning whether or not Blasco carried out additional endeavors in that narrative style, but it is quite apparent that Blasco was very much aware of that literary current and also experimented with it. Ultimately, he never became recognized as a detective fiction writer, in spite of his publicly avowed literary indebtedness to Edgar Allan Poe, but it should be noted that at the time of this short story experimentation Blasco was more fully engaged with his political career, his newspaper adventure *El Pueblo*, and the Valencian cycle of novels. (Poe is widely recognized as the Father of detective fiction due to the 1841 publication of his *The Murders in the Rue Morgue*. For more information concerning Blasco and Poe, see “Poe Not Appreciated”, 1920). Additionally, detective fiction generally involves middle-class issues and characters, and Blasco’s more immediate attention was focused on the lower class.

Blasco’s Philosophy of Literature and Reactions to Such

Obviously, the reaction to/against Blasco indicates his success at creating multiple experiences of literature since those reactions involve impassioned responses. My primary focus in this essay has been on the evolution of Blasco’s writings, but attention, albeit brief, should also be given to both Blasco’s ideas about literature and the negative reception that he received as additional indicators of the power of his words. In 1909, in Buenos Aires, Blasco stated—using the word “art” but obviously from the context of the rest of the speech meaning “the novel”—that

El arte es la suprema manifestación, es la suprema propaganda de toda idea nueva [...] El arte tiene una gran influencia en la vida de la humanidad; de ahí que nosotros [los novelistas] somos responsables del gran poder que llevamos en nosotros mismos, porque nosotros también somos la mente que educa a las generaciones y hace más loable el progreso y lo hacemos democrático. Nosotros, los hombres de novela, somos la suprema grandeza, y lo que hacemos en ciertos momentos de la vida atiende a que el rico dé algo al pobre; y no tenemos mayor satisfacción que la de saber que la virtud se inclina del lado del bueno, y el mayor premio, no que caiga un aplauso, sino que caiga una lágrima de emoción (Art is

the supreme manifestation; it is the supreme promotion of every new idea [...] Art has a great influence on the life of humanity; hence we [the novelists] are responsible for the great power we carry in ourselves because we are also the mind that educates generations and makes progress more praiseworthy and democratic. We, the men of the novel, are the supreme greatness, and what we do at certain moments of life assists the rich in giving something to the poor, and we have no greater satisfaction than knowing that virtue tilts toward the side of the good, and the greatest reward [is] not that we receive applause but that a tear of emotion falls.) (Ibáñez 1966: 200)

In other words, Blasco deeply believes that literature has a purpose, is endowed with transformative power, and in order for it to realize its potential the narrative needs to be arranged, manipulated, polished, and published in a particular manner; a true experience of literature causes the reader to have an emotional reaction that, in turn, causes her/him to better humanity and society at large. Such, obviously, is a long way from the objective empiricism of Naturalism, for which Blasco is more commonly recognized.

While I have been unable to locate any official Franco government records as to why Blasco was anathema to that regime, certainly Blasco's conscious manipulation of his works to create a certain type of experience of literature more supportive of the commoner and poor man, while simultaneously antagonistic toward the Church and certain customs such as bullfighting or the monarchy that he considered outdated, was reason enough for his being blackballed by the Franco authorities. Alborg notes, in fact, that during that period of Spanish history

el silencio que rodeaba el nombre de Blasco hacía sospechosa a toda persona que inquiriera sobre él; [...] ni siquiera era prudente mencionar a quienes le habían dado informes o noticias sobre Blasco. Y señala—es un hecho bien conocido—cuán extraña le resultaba la ausencia de libros suyos, incluso en la biblioteca de su misma Alma Mater, la Universidad de Valencia, y hasta en la Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid, donde se supone que deben existir ejemplares de todos los libros publicados en el país. Recuerda Grove Day además, que cuando se pretendió celebrar en 1967 el centenario del nacimiento de Blasco, fue prohibido por las autoridades franquistas todo acto público, incluso en su propia ciudad natal. Estas mismas autoridades, apenas acabada la guerra, suprimieron el nombre de Blasco de la calle que le estaba dedicada en Valencia e hicieron destruir la lápida que la rotulaba. (The silence that surrounded Blasco's name made anyone who inquired about him suspect; [...] it was not even wise to mention those who had given you reports or news about Blasco. And it points out—this is a well-known fact—how strange the absence of his books was, even in the library of his Alma Mater, the University of Valencia, and even in the National Library of Madrid, where copies are supposed to exist of all books published in the country. Grove Day also remembers that when they tried to celebrate in 1967 the centenary of Blasco's birth, every public event was banned by the Franco authorities, even in

his own hometown. These same authorities, with the war barely over, suppressed the name of Blasco from the street that was dedicated to him in Valencia and had the monument that labeled it destroyed.) (Alborg 1999: 451)

Such drastic measures would certainly not have been taken against just any author; that is, the positive experience of literature that Blasco created for the masses and more progressive element of society was, at the same time, an equally negative experience for the more traditionalists. Maria Angharad Thomas quotes the writer Arturo Barea as stating that during his time in Catholic schools in Spain in the 1910s children were taught that “reading books by the republican novelist and politician Blasco Ibáñez was akin to ‘giving arms to Satan’” (Thomas 2012: 62). As evidenced by the continuation of the Blasquista movement and the Partido de Unión Republicana Autonomista (Party of Autonomous Republican Unity), founded by Blasco in 1908, until the time of the Spanish Civil War, Blasco political influence outlasted his own death, but it is arguably evident that without his literature such acclaim and continuance would never have occurred. As Goldberg notes:

The secret of Blasco Ibanez’s success, I believe, lies in his intense, powerful earnestness—his closeness to the heart of humanity. His plot may apparently be placed against a Valentian or an Andalusian background—and in his regional novels he endows these backgrounds with a life and a character all their own—yet the real scene is the wide world, even as the real actors are you and I who read. Power, actuality, interpretative description—these are the Spaniard’s conquering attributes. (Goldberg 1919: 238)

Conclusions

By all accounts, Blasco Ibáñez is widely recognized as one of Spain’s most famous Naturalist writers. His use of such in an attempt to affect societal change has long been recognized, but lesser attention has been paid by the critical world to his conscious manipulation in remarkably effective fashions to create an experience of literature in his fictional narratives. Blasco’s love affair with literature began at an early age, and he believed himself to have been born for the purpose of telling stories. Obviously, as he matured, so did his stories. But Blasco’s writings also underwent additional strategic and deliberate permutations involving style, focus, and print medium. Having begun his literary career with monographic-length novels, the more regional-focused Valencian series involves a shift to the serialized form. Correcting social ills on a more national scale would be his emphasis in the subsequent series. And World War I would provide an opportunity for overt propagandizing for the Allied cause while affording yet another medium for his literary output, the cinema. Finally, Edgar Allan Poe provides a mo-

del for Blasco's foray into the detective fiction genre. That is, a close examination of Blasco's writings reveals him to be an author who evolves from storyteller to soldier of the pen, an evolution that was both conscious and efficacious.

While some, more recent critical analyses of Blasco's works have examined his fiction in comparison to accepted tenets of Romanticism, Modernism, Impressionism, and other literary or artistic movements, little research currently exists which explores the authorial intent by the author—or at least his conscious management of verbiage. Obviously, however, as shown in this essay, a large body of Blasco's fiction was more than merely entertaining storytelling; he often manipulated the language he used in such a way that the overall narrative would create an experience of literature for the reader more favorable toward his particular social, political, or philosophical views. In light of such, much work remains to be done to re-examine more in depth this aspect of Blasco's process of writing. A closer analysis of the actual texts themselves may, in fact, bring a new understanding of the author and his novels and that Blasco's being a soldier of the pen began much earlier than previously recognized. Perhaps, for example, his perception that his pre-1894 works contained a less sophisticated level of soldiering was actually what caused him to renounce them. A better understanding, and comparative examination, of the titles donated by Cabrerizo to Blasco's family, and that the future novelists clandestinely read, may reveal a more complete understanding of important influences on his nascent storytelling. Given that the Valencian series—Blasco's most widely recognized novels—was written while he was a Diputado in Madrid, the dearth of research on the relationship between his political views and those novels is somewhat surprising. In short, there is still much to be learned about Blasco Ibáñez and the way in which he created an experience of literature; future research in this vein will, I believe, revolutionize the way we understand and perceive this giant of Spanish literature.

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