THE INFLUENCE OF EMILE ZOLA'S NATURALISM
ON THE NOVELS OF VICENTE BLASCO IBÁÑEZ

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the North
Texas State Teachers College in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Denton, Texas
August, 1938

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It is on the idea that Vicente Blasco Ibáñez's writings were influenced by Émile Zola that this study is based. Because the novels of the Spanish author contain many suggestions of the Zolaesque theory of Naturalism, many literary critics have assumed that he did obtain much of his inspiration from this source; they have even called him the "Spanish Zola." In working up this thesis, I have read and studied the thirteen novels included in Blasco Ibáñez's first two literary periods. The reason for my excluding his later work is that, after the completion of the second series, his novels cease to be purely Spanish and become international. I shall try to determine how much he imitated Zola's Naturalism, and to show to what extent it is correct to call him the "Spanish Zola."
CHAPTER I

ZOLA'S NATURALISM

It is my purpose in this thesis to show any influence that Emile Zola's Naturalism had on the novels of Blasco Ibáñez. Because there was only a quarter of a century's difference between the births and deaths of these two men, Zola having lived from 1840 to 1902 and Ibáñez from 1867 to 1928, and because Naturalism was organized as a theory by Zola himself, it seems best to show in the beginning the literary heritage from which Zola obtained his Naturalistic ideas and the development of the theory during his lifetime.

Nineteenth-century French writers who had already broken away from Romanticism, and whose works represented the earlier development of Realism, were Balzac, Flaubert, the Goncourts, and Taine. These men had not actually inaugurated Naturalism as a literary method, nor had they given it a title. They merely had ideas which, pervading the atmosphere in which Emile Zola grew up, were gathered together by this remarkably energetic writer into a unity which formed the basis of the new literary movement, Naturalism. All these ideas, though scattered, had a single purpose, that of using scientific procedures
When Zola began to write, science had taken a strong hold on world thought. People no longer wished to believe in the mystical, supernatural 'ideas which had been taught by religious orders. They wished to discover scientifically simple truths for the explanation of things not understood before. So it was that Naturalism, which wished to find the truth and thus free man of the mystical, superstitious explanation of the world, became the literary expression of the scientific age. Zola felt that Naturalism was the expression of universal inquiry, the result of the need of seeking truth wherever it might be. It wished to free people from the drudgery of saying that "all things are as they are by the will of God, whose ways are past finding out." It seemed to be opposed to the religious and social traditions of the past and the pursuit of Virtue in literature. Leo XIII said that naturalistic opinions wished "to do away altogether with Christian institutions,

2Ibid., p. 204.
5Josephson, op. cit., p. 204.
and, disregarding the rights of God, to attribute to man the supreme authority in society."\(^6\)

Because Zola, in his early life, had been a victim of destitution and hunger to the point of pawning his coat, selling his last pair of trousers in freezing weather, and setting traps on the roof for sparrows and broiling them on the end of a curtain rod,\(^7\) he was a bitter man by the time he reached maturity. "Above all he had known hunger, 'the empty, gnawing entrails of the poor, like beasts gnashing their teeth, and pouncing upon the very garbage. . . .'\(^8\) This hard life had created in him a pessimistic conception of human nature which made everything base and ignominious stand out in his observations.\(^9\) Instead of striking a medium and seeing both the good and the bad in life, as the realists had done, he saw only the worst. And as his idea of Naturalism was that it must be pure artistic truth, he felt that he was performing a duty when he exposed to view all the vile things which he saw. An Italian writer, Edmondo de Amicis, said of Zola: "One would say he was a man who having been wounded by the world, avenged himself by

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\(^7\) Josephson, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

\(^8\) Ibid., p. 227.

tearing away her mask and showing her to be what she is, shameful and odious."¹⁰

Because Naturalism did not fix any limit on the subject-matter it could include, this method of writing broadened the literary field. It allowed a larger variety of topics than previous literary expression had done, and it no longer denied the right of commonplace things and coarser strata of society to appear in literature. Zola took great pleasure in dealing with the filth and intemperance, grossness and crudeness of human life.¹¹ His unsurpassed handling of huge crowds of people of low rank, such as a morning procession of laborers, a riotous mob of miners, and the confusion of a battle-field, shows that he undertook the portrayal of the masses in all their grime, suffering, and ignorance. This attempt had not been made before this intensely realistic writer sought to disclose the frightful realities of every stratum of human society.¹² His novels were all based on "exact, truthful, unshrinking observation of nature and man"; and, although his revelations shocked society, he persisted in his realistic descriptions because his "sole ambition was to leave a work behind him that would be as big, as living as he could make it."¹⁴

¹⁰ Josephson, op. cit., p. 233.
¹¹ Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 205.
To make his presentation of material as realistic as possible, he made no use of the flowery, elegant language that had previously been used to camouflage the maladjustments in society. Instead, he wrote those things with which he wished to impress the world in the most revolting language he could find.

Thus, by writing in as individual a manner as possible and by taking only the exceptional from the material collected in his observations, Emile Zola secured more attention than he would have secured if he had merely followed the Realism of his predecessors. This fame and renown was what he craved, even though it were got through criticism, scorn, and contempt. Reducing the men he observed and wrote about to appetites, he brought to light the most vile and the most abject sides of human nature.\textsuperscript{15}

It has been said that Zola gave a soul to things and withdrew the soul from man. Criminals and morons abound in his pages. 'La bete humaine' is his favorite phrase, and the physiological presentation of the Realists is pushed to a frequent and deliberate bestiality.\textsuperscript{16}

He was determined to write about every type of human being: "rascals, murderers, saints, panders, whores, bourgeois, priests, soldiers, statesmen, shopkeepers, good, bad, stupid,

\textsuperscript{15}Petit de Julleville, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 205.

malicious, angelic. But above all, Zola knew his poor people, his gross, his bestial people.\(^{17}\) In this way, he intended to follow the advice of his teacher, Vilmessaint, who had told him that, in order to be famous, "one must surprise the public."\(^{18}\) Zola wished "to picture the working classes with an exactness that required using the colloquial language of the slums. Here is a writer who, to quote Othello, expresses his 'worst thoughts with his worst words.'\(^{19}\)

Zola's naturalistic method was pessimistic. Its pessimism comes from the idea that there is no supreme power pre-eminent over man, and that things happening to the world are not a result of a spiritual will, but are a necessity of nature. In other words, the final explanation of things is found not in a hyper-physical power, but in the natural material laws of science. According to Zola, man is not directed by a force from above, but is a product of his heredity and his environment. The things that are wrong with the world and the unworthy actions of human beings are not the result of a Divine wish for punishment; they are caused by the faults of the pre-existing humanity which makes each succeeding generation what it is. We are what we are and we do as we do because of what nature - that is,

\(^{17}\) Josephson, op. cit., p. 226.
\(^{18}\) Ibid.,
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 232.
our heredity and environment - has made of us. There is no way of improving the existing conditions or solving our everlasting problems, because each generation is helpless to overcome what has been built up for hundreds of years. On this idea of the everlasting decline of humanity, Emile Zola based his denial of a Supreme Being: there is no Supreme Being or he would right things again and help us start our existence over in a better way. Zola's belief in a total lack of a solution for human problems shows his fatalistic attitude. His idea that human beings are what they are because of pre-existing forces combined with the influence of present situations, and that they cannot overcome their heredity and environment, shows his determinism.

Since Naturalism holds that the "laws of brute Nature are viewed as grimly controlling the destinies of helpless and hopeless man" instead of its being done by an extra-mundane cause, Zola wished "to penetrate beyond the untrue appearances and, under the polish of a civilization more or less refined, to discover in men this gorille which each of us has in his blood." His Naturalism replaced the spiritual, sentimental, or metaphysical man with a physiological man, obedient to the physico-chemical laws and influenced by his environment. Zola studied not only the character and temperament of the men in his novels.

20 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 623.
21 Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 205.
but also their bodies, their desires, and their appetites; he went so far as to write something of their bodily functions. To Zola, "human nature is that of a ferocious and lewd animal."\(^2\) Just as a scientist wishes to know all about a patient, so Zola felt that he had to go into the very interior of his "patients" to see what cells in the organisms made the characters think and act as they did. He placed the stomach on the same level as the heart or the brain, for in the stomach he found a locale where he could "better exercise the delicacy of his analysis."\(^2\) Zola said:

> If ... our intellectual and sentimental activity is ruled by fixed laws just as our corporeal activity is, the writer, the novelist especially, must 'opérer sur les caractères, sur les passions, sur les faits humains et sociaux, comme le physiologiste sur les corps.'\(^2\)

When Zola was developing his new theory to be used as a tool of scientific expression, he seized upon the term Naturalism, transforming it from its traditional scientific sense and making it into a war-cry for the new literature and drama.\(^2\) Then, in order to define it, he found "nothing better than using a book well known among the savants, *L'introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale,*"\(^2\)

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 205. \(^{23}\) Ibid.  
\(^{24}\) Ibid., p. 203. 
\(^{25}\) Josephson, op. cit., p. 204. 
\(^{26}\) Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 204.
by Dr. Claude Bernard. Bernard said that "medicine, hitherto an art, could not become a science unless it subjected itself to the procedure of experimentation like physics and chemistry." So Zola, who wished to write scientific novels, wrote "The Experimental Novel," replacing the word médecine with the word romancier, and obtaining the idea of a "roman expérimental." He felt that the naturalistic novelist should apply the experimental method of science to the people and situations around him, observing all the characters and situations which life and experience provided for him and using his novels as a laboratory in which to work on them. Although Zola did not perceive it, the term expérimental was a misnomer, because the writer cannot produce and manipulate his material as the scientist can.

Even though the term expérimental is inappropriate when applied to novels in that it makes the actual observation and imitation of life appear to be a matter of simple laboratory treatment, it is significant in that, under the idea of experimentation, it claims for the novelist the right to modify nature. Zola felt that his novels must not be a true copy of reality, since this would not be art.

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28 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 625.
29 Ibid., p. 625.
30 Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 204.
Whereas he approved the method of writing which called for
the intervention of the novelist and the modification of
nature by one's own personal vision, Zola not only ob-
served reality but also invented ways which, in writing,
would make this reality seem more vivid and more impressive
to the public. To him, "art is not reduced to a pure and
simple tracing of fact if the novelist's invention, modi-
fying only the incidents, observes faithfully those rela-
tions that are the laws of nature." "Art, says Zola,
is 'la nature vue a travers un temperament.'" Thus,
the writer may make what he sees and describes have an in-
dividuality which is the immediate product of his own
personality.

Zola's style, because of his personality's having been
more or less warped by hardships, making him stubborn and
tenacious in his adherence to a certain and unchanging form
of ideas and written expression, was characterized by a
"narrowness of logic." Ferdinand Brunetière said: "Zola
expounds . . . the idea of a modern art, entirely experi-
mental and materialistic. . . . With his brutal style,
his repulsive and ignoble pre-occupations he has gone

farther than all the other realists." 36 Zola himself said:

"I wish to hold to the current of commonplace lives, to the
simplest facts, while making it very touching." 37

The descriptions which play such an important
part in L'Assommoir are exceedingly living; for
Zola's theory of description was 'a state of en-
vironment which determines and completes the human
being.' Zola's style harmonizes with his point of
view, in its lack of distinction and its heavy
lumbering tread which can become, on occasions, a
powerful stride." 38

"The man and his method live in his works." 39 He
would go about, notebook in hand, setting down facts just
as he observed them. Then, when he had established a back-
ground on which his characters could move, he would drop
his rôle of observer and begin his experimentation, showing
every ounce of energy expended in the movement and every
particle of the scenery until he usually obtained a series
of boring, minutely-detailed descriptions. His novels are
filled with "des vastes ensembles matériels et des infinis
détails extérieurs." 40 He was cold and calculating in every
word he set down, every paragraph he wrote; his novels were
all planned and outlined to the least detail months before
he began to write them down. It seems that he never wrote
because of a desire to express himself artistically. In-

36 Josephson, op. cit., pp. 204-205.
37 Ibid., p. 228.
38 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 627.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., p. 626.
stead, he wrote because there was a necessity for discovering and unmasking truth, a duty which he owed to society. He proceeded in every work that he wrote in an elaborate, methodical fashion, handling as many as twelve hundred characters in the twenty volumes of the *Rougon-Macquart* series.\(^{41}\) "He could take things in a mass, . . . and marshal them methodically, as a general handles his battalions."\(^{42}\)

He worked with the placidity of an old compiler, first soliloquizing over his general ideas, the two or three forces in play, his chief character; then writing a sketch or outline; then a more elaborate sketch, or scenario; finally a scenario of individual chapters and scenes, down to the last details; and of his files of information, reports; his gallery of major and minor characters.\(^{43}\)

In spite of all the careful, detailed work that Zola did in order to produce his novels the way he wanted them, the final outcome of his work was always as simple as he could make it. In writing he " submits la nature to the needs of his art; he disciplines, he corrects, he simplifies, because of a need of unity,"\(^{45}\) this tumultuous and disordered complexity called Naturalism. He struck out every complex scene and replaced it with the most plausible, the simplest

\(^{41}\) Josephson, *op. cit.*, p. 354.  
\(^{42}\) Ibid., p. 285.  
\(^{43}\) Ibid., pp. 285-286.  
\(^{44}\) Ibid., p. 256.  
\(^{45}\) Petit de Julléville, *op. cit.*, p. 207.
and barest development. In speaking of the plan for L'Assommoir, Zola said: "The character of this book must be simplicity itself; a story of a magisterial nakedness, few complications, few scenes, nothing romantic, or forced." Thus, he always reduced the complex to the simple.

Naturalism "over-emphasized pathology and crime, grossness and pessimism." In his Rougon-Macquart series, Zola "gives a nervous disorder as a point of departure for his work and diminishes as much as possible the forces of the intelligence and the will which could give a blow to the fatal influences of the flesh and the blood." In other words, he wished to show the helplessness of his characters, whose lives, symbolical of the lives of all humanity, were determined past remedy by heredity, and whose attainment in life was directly measured by the situations in which their social environment placed them. His novel, Docteur Pascal, is a hideous summing-up of the history of psychopathic cases as they appear in the successive generations of a particular family tainted by psychical weakness.

"People have accused Zola of dissoluteness of imagination, and of dealing with filth and intemperance, of writing

46 Josephson, op. cit., p. 229.
47 Nitze and Dargan, op. cit., p. 682.
48 Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 204.
of scandalous things just to sell his books." His peculiar idea of the necessity of artistic truth and his subsequent sense of duty in revealing to society the hideous things in life, do prompt him to deal with the abjectness of human beings. They do not, however, make him go so low in thought as to merit having the term "immoral" applied to his truthful writings.50

Although his first works did nothing more than describe social ills, without moralizing, Zola finally admitted that his books contained many lessons if one should wish to look for them. His basic idea was:

Educate the worker, take him out of the misery in which he lives, combat the crowding and the promiscuity of the workers' quarters where the air thickens and stinks; above all prevent drunkenness which decimates the people and kills mind and body.51

Because he wanted his writing to be useful as a social eye-opener, he ended by not being able to pick up his pen without moralizing.52

In this chapter I have tried to show the main characteristics of Zola's Naturalism with its unbounded choice of subject matter, its often-revolting language, its excessive and exaggerated realism; to show something of the

49 Ibid., pp. 205-206. 50 Ibid., p. 206.
51 Josephson, op. cit., p. 233.
52 Ibid., p. 390.
type of man that Emile Zola was; to show his attitude toward life and his tendencies in writing, which will be used later in comparing him with Vicente Blasco Ibáñez. The greatest part of his true naturalistic tendency is found in his materialism and in his pessimism. Jules Lemaitre, a French critic, probably described him as exactly as it is possible to describe an unusual, revolutionary man like Emile Zola. Lemaitre called him an epic poet, a pessimistic poet, describing him as a "writer who by virtue of his idea, or vision of an idea, notably transforms reality, and thus makes it live again." 53  

53 Petit de Julleville, op. cit., p. 204.  
54 Josephson, op. cit., p. 375.
CHAPTER II

THE LITERARY ATMOSPHERE DURING THE FORMATIVE PERIOD OF VICTENTE BLASCO IBAÑEZ

After the death of Fernando VII in 1833, the Liberals, who had been exiled during his reign because of their revolutionary thinking, returned home, bringing with them the ideas of Romanticism that they had acquired during their exile and introducing into Spanish Literature tendencies toward Romanticism. However, because the tendency of the Spanish temperament and nature is intensely realistic, it did not take long for Spaniards to realize that their best and most suitable mode of expression was Realism. During the transition from the Romanticism of the first half to the Realism of the last half of the nineteenth century, there developed a type of literature which, though somewhat realistic, had not yet broken away from the romantic influence. This new form of writing was the artículo de costumbres. The costumbristas wrote short sketches in which they made a study of the types of Spanish people and of the different customs peculiar to the various regions of the Iberian peninsula. In the latter part of the century, these artículos were expanded into longer works and were developed into what was called the regional novel.
In the regional novel, Realism replaced the foreign-born Romanticism as the literary vogue in Spain. Writers in this vogue obtained their realistic material from careful observation of things about them, each novelist studying the activities and customs of his own province. "It was to Regionalism that the Spanish novel in the last quarter of the nineteenth century owed its greatest triumphs." This genre proved to be one of the most apt methods for the expression of Spanish genius that Spain has ever known.

It was not long, however, before this literary method was contaminated by foreign influence which again invaded Spain, bringing Zola's French Naturalism across the Pyrenees.

Under the influence of Zola, a group of Spanish authors, who set out originally to write regional novels, showed clearly the tendency towards the mechanistic, scientific, detailed studies of Naturalism. It is interesting to note the increasing influence of the French writer's repulsive method on these Spanish regional novelists, beginning with Pereda, whose first writing was done before Naturalism had arrived in Spain, and ending with Blasco Ibáñez, who lived at such a time that he came in direct contact with Zola's Naturalism when it was enjoying its greatest success. It seems logical to think that the ever-increasing naturalistic trends built up gradually by the regional novelists.

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had a great effect on the methods and ideas of Blasco Ibáñez by the time he began to write.

As an example of the work done by those regional novelists who developed in Spain the ideas and technique of Zola, let us examine first the writings of José María de Pereda. Pereda's pictures of life in Montaña, the province which he portrayed, were detailed, although he was not wholly sympathetic with the naturalistic method; he pictured life exactly as he saw it, not, however, employing the exaggerated descriptions and the coarseness that were characteristic of Zola's works. Because one of his main ideas was that people should be satisfied with their lot and should accept it without question, because he had no faith in social evolution and progress, and because he felt that happiness could be gained by following the teachings of the church, Pereda doubtless had no influence whatever on the social beliefs of Blasco Ibáñez. However, his writings on the corruption of urban life and his stories of fisher-folk and primitive peasants may have provided a basis for the similar subjects in the writings of Blasco

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4 Ford, op. cit., p. 231.

5 Northup, op. cit., p. 370.
Blasco Ibáñez. Any influence which Pereda may have had on
Blasco Ibáñez must have been in subject material rather
than in literary style.

A second example of Regionalism, and one showing the
influence of Naturalism to a greater extent than did the
works of Pereda, is found in the novels of Benito Pérez
Galdós, one of the most powerful and prolific writers of the
modern world. He was not only a regional novelist, but a
novelist of all of Spain. Although Galdós was revolutionary
to a small extent in his urge for social reform, he was only
mildly naturalistic. He was very much in favor of progress,
and directed many attacks in his novels against clericalism
and bigotry and the injustices of Spanish governmental
practices. It is possible that Blasco Ibáñez got some of
his ideas for attacking the entire social system from the
thesis novels of Galdós, and that his ideas for the educa-
tion of the masses and for practical improvements were de-
rived from this "apostle of progress" whose birth preceded
Blasco Ibáñez's by only twenty-four years.

Showing the naturalistic influence on Spanish regional
novelists to a very advanced degree, Countess Emilia Pardo
Bazán obtained most of her literary method from Emile Zola.

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6 Northup, op. cit., p. 373.
7 Ibid., p. 371.
8 Ford, op. cit., p. 233.
This woman writer of Galicia wished definitely to introduce Zola's Naturalism into Spain in her *La cuestión palpitante*, published in 1883. The naturalistic theory had previously been felt only a little in her country, but after her overdrawn pictures of social and moral degeneracy, and after several more of her novels done in imitation of Zola, many enthusiastic advocates of Naturalism came to the front.

The fact that Pardo Bazán did introduce Naturalism into her country, even though she did not go to the full length in its practice, gives her an important place in the list of Blasco Ibáñez's predecessors.

Leopoldo Alas was a regional novelist of Asturias who wrote under the pseudonym Clarín. He followed Pardo Bazán closely in emulating her enthusiasm for Naturalism. Though in his later writings he was idealistic, his *La Regenta*, published in 1885, imitated French Naturalism with careful details and penetrating observation. As were most of the novelists of that period, Clarín was liberal, anti-clerical, and progressive, thus providing his part in creating the literary atmosphere which influenced Blasco Ibáñez. It is evident that his *La Regenta*, published when Blasco Ibáñez was nearly twenty years old, helped form the tendencies of the young naturalistic-writer-to-be.


10 *Northup, op. cit.*, p. 375.
Also a novelist of Asturias, whose novels contained bits of Naturalism here and there, was Armando Palacio Valdés. He was not very successful in his attempts at writing naturalistic novels, and he tried to avoid the worst features of the naturalistic method. His writing that which was "startling, shocking, and savoury"11 just to be in literary fashion probably helped to set an example for the writings of Blasco Ibáñez. Valdés clearly was not a sincere advocate of the theory then popular in Spanish literature, however, for he disagreed with one of its main strongholds, pessimism. Optimism rather than pessimism was his forte.12

After having considered these nineteenth-century novelists who helped to instil ideas of progress, social reformation, and Naturalism into the late nineteenth-century literary practice, we come to the man who was the veritable embodiment of French Naturalism in-so-far as it was developed in Spain. Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, 1867-1928, was born in Valencia and became in later years the novelist of his region. It was during Blasco Ibáñez's youth that Naturalism was gradually sifting into Spain, and that regional novelists were influenced by it. At the time, then, when the young Spaniard was absorbing a literary technique for his own


12Northup, op. cit., p. 377.
future use, the success of Zola's method was at its greatest height. Thus, the young Valencian was easily won over to the Naturalistic School.

As a young man Blasco Ibáñez studied law and early became interested in political affairs. Although he was very radical in his desire for social revolution and a complete upheaval of the unjust national government, and although the newspaper that he published, El Pueblo, stirred up political dissatisfaction and turmoil to the extent of making Blasco Ibáñez suffer a great many periods of imprisonment and exile, he was sent eight times by his native city, Valencia, as a Republican deputy to the Parliament at Madrid. He was a sincere Liberal and directed his attacks in his novels against both government and church, disliking especially the centralized administration at Madrid and the narrowness of church clericalism and bigotry.

Because Blasco Ibáñez was a very persistent and industrious worker, his personality was suited to the energetic style of writing employed by the man he imitated, Emile Zola. Displaying further his vital energy, Blasco Ibáñez believed that a writer should live a full life and let the ideas collected during life conditions and experiences accumulate until he felt a consuming desire to express himself in writing.13 As is seen in the following

Spanish quotation, Blasco Ibáñez's life and personality were vitally active, a factor which is noticeably present through all his novels:

De estas páginas surge el verdadero Blasco Ibáñez, un Blasco vigoroso, lleno de ensueño y de reca energía, un Blasco multiactivo como un artista del Renacimiento, un hombre formidable que ha sido a la vez agitador, político, periodista, colonizador, conferencista, novelista, diputado, historiador, argonauta y viajero.¹⁴

In writing of the formative period of Blasco Ibáñez's life, showing the indirect or general influence of Naturalism on him through his Spanish contemporaries and predecessors, and showing the direct or specific influence on him by the head of the French Naturalistic School, it would seem apropos to examine and display the extent that Blasco Ibáñez imitated Zola in the tendencies of Naturalism. However, we shall leave this comparison of the two men until the concluding chapter, and search meanwhile in the novels of the Spanish writer for evidence which would indicate his varying imitation of Zola throughout the course of his first two periods of writing, from 1894 to 1909.

CHAPTER III

THE NOVELS OF BLASCO IBÁÑEZ'S

FIRST PERIOD OF WRITING

Because it was his first novel, Arroz y Tartana, published in 1894, was the expression of all the naturalistic ideas which had been gathering in Blasco Ibáñez's mind during his formative period. A story of the well-to-do bourgeois life in Valencia, it presents in minutest detail the greed, pride, and selfishness which invade the business and social life of commercial circles. Although it is a realistic picture, the novel is comparatively ugly and uninteresting because there is too much emphasis on useless detail and too little stress on characterization and plot-development. In spite of the frequently brilliant descriptions which, of course, were in imitation of Emile Zola, this is one of the poorest of the regional novels of Blasco Ibáñez. Perhaps this is because Blasco Ibáñez, a beginning writer at that time, attempted to imitate the French author's Naturalism too much, without employing enough of his own personal method.

Since never-ending, detailed description is the most striking characteristic of Emile Zola's Naturalism, and since in Arroz y Tartana Blasco Ibáñez made great use of imitating Zola's descriptions, it would seem well to quote one of these
imitative passages. Let it suffice to say, however, that, in this novel, Blasco Ibáñez, like Zola, wrote page after page of description which one could omit without missing a particle of the actual story. He describes the homes and streets of Valencia, the daily dress of his characters, the thoughts going on in their minds, and their facial expressions. Because one of his peculiar qualities is his ability to describe the sense of smell, he frequently describes vividly the odors in various parts of Valencia, as is seen in the following quotations:

Doña Manuela iba mal por el arroyo. Causábanle náuseas los carros repletos del estiércol recogido en los puntos de venta; hortalizas pisoteadas, frutas podridas, todo el fermento de un mercado en el que siempre hay sol.1

Un olor punzante de aceite frito impregnaba el ambiente. El fogón de la bufolería era un pebetero de la peor especie, que perfumaba de grasa toda la plazuela, irritando pegajosamente los olfatos y las gargantas.2

Blasco Ibáñez, without moralizing, presents many aspects of modern society in Arroz y Tartana which need attention and improvement. Not wishing to give a solution for the social ills of which he writes, he merely calls our attention to them. For instance, in Arroz y Tartana, he complains about modern people who copy foreigners in dress, and who try to imitate the actions of the rich. He cannot wholly tolerate progress

2Ibid., pp. 132-133.
because it takes away the Valencian traditions and discredits the men who stood for them:

Aquí . . . estaba la riqueza y la honra de Valencia; aquí . . . (estaba) . . . aquella gente . . . que resultaba respetable por ser la fiel guardadora de las costumbres tradicionales, la sostenedora de ese carácter valenciano, sobrio, alegre y dicharachero, que casi ha desaparecido. ¡Qué hombres aquéllos! Tenían sus defectos . . . pero así y todo, los cambiaría yo por los hombres de hoy. 3

His idea of the inequality of society is clearly expressed in the following passage:

Es verdad que los afortunados arruinaban a los infelices, pero ¡qué remedio! . . . Había que amoldarse a las exigencias del mundo, tomar parte en la lucha por la existencia; la sociedad estaba constituida así. Para que vivan unos hay que devorar a otros. 4

The contempt which Blasco Ibáñez felt for the Spanish "afán de hacerse rico," 5 for their desire to find "el modo de quitar legalmente la bolsa al vecino," 6 and for their "deseos de meterse en una esfera superior a la suya," 7 is very evident throughout the pages of this novel.

Doña Manuela, who is "tan amante del prestigio de la familia," 8 is so weak, bodily and mentally, that she becomes the mistress of Antonio Cuadros so that she can have enough money to drive her carriage, to dress herself and her fashionable daughters elegantly, and to entertain her well-

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3 Ibid., p. 173. 4 Ibid., pp. 200-201.
5 Ibid., p. 206. 6 Ibid., p. 208.
7 Ibid., p. 209. 8 Ibid., p. 223.
to-do social friends in her home. The idea for this tragedy seems to have come directly from the belief of Emile Zola that the will is powerless when confronted with the desires of the body. Manuela's vanity needs luxury to appease its wants, and the desires of the flesh are so much stronger than the power of her will that she degrades herself and feels quite satisfied with the arrangement!

No se podía pedir mayor felicidad. Cumplía con la conciencia y con el placer. A un lado, la esposa legitima; al otro, doña Manuela, la satisfacción de la carne, el alimento de su vanidad.9

When Juanito, Manuela's worthy son, discovers the sins of his mother, he goes through a mental crisis which almost makes him lose his mind. Yet he feels that something powerful and mysterious is guiding him through his torment and dictating to him what he must do. "Indudablemente, allá arriba había alguien viéndolo todo."10 The fact that there are many passages referring to a Supreme Power in this novel, indicates that Blasco Ibáñez did not share Zola's conception that the ultimate Will is materialistic. Blasco Ibáñez did believe in God and religion; he objected, however, to the meaningless pageantry which had become a part of Catholicism, as is shown in this description of the response of the multitude to a religious procession which was going through Valencian streets on a holy day:

9 Ibid., p. 281. 10 Ibid., p. 306.
El poético aparato del culto católico imponía a la muchedumbre con toda su fuerza sugestiva. Las mujeres llevaban las manos a los ojos humedecidos sin saber por qué, y las viejas golpeaban con furia el pecho, entre suspiros de agonizante, lanzando un "¡Señor, Dios mío!" que hacía volver con inquietud la cabeza a los más próximos.

The end of *Arroz y Tartana* is pessimistic, not merely because there are many unfortunate deaths, but because there is no expression of future hope. Don Eugenio, the old merchant who is the last veteran of the *Mercado*, the last of the old-fashioned tradesmen to survive the pushing, crowding, and gold-seeking of the modern merchants, describes a vicious cycle of modern commercialism:

¡Hermoso porvenir! . . . Sea usted honrado, trabaje usted mucho, para verse arruinado, sin otro recurso que pedir limosna en la puerta de San Juan a los hijos de mis amigos.

Thus, Blasco Ibáñez notably imitates Zola's naturalistic writings in *Arroz y Tartana*: the descriptions are done in the Zolaesque manner; there are many situations in which huge crowds are successfully moved about by Blasco Ibáñez, just as Zola had done in his novels; social ills are presented which display their own needs and possibilities for improvement, without any need on the author's part for moralizing; the idea is carried out that man is a purely physiological being with carnal appetites; there is some objection raised to religion, although there is no denial of God; and the ending has a pessimistic, fatalistic note. It may be because

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all this imitation of Émile Zola is not entirely compatible with the ideas and personality of Blasco Ibáñez, that Arroz y Tartana, his first, is considered the weakest of his Valencian novels.

His second regional novel, Flor de Mayo, published in 1895, is the colorful, dramatic story of life in the Valencian fishing quarter. This novel is more appealing than Arroz y Tartana because it is full of wonderful descriptions of lively scenes, such as the Valencian fish-market at dawn and the ceremonies of Holy Week. Because it concerns people of lower social rank than does Arroz y Tartana, the lives and customs of its simple characters present more local color to the reader. Moreover, the happiness and the tragedy which fate brings to these crude people seem to affect one far more than the almost melodramatic tragedy in Ibáñez's first Valencian novel.

I mention fate, because Flor de Mayo is quite fatalistic and deterministic. The superstitions of the fisher-folk show their belief that the course of their lives is pre-determined by a natural force, that their station in life is determined so that they cannot hope to rise above it, and that whatever happens during their lifetime is decreed and fated to happen. This fatalistic attitude explains why a fisherman's wife might see her husband, father, or brother drown at sea, and yet never wish for her sons to pursue another occupation. The pitiful characters in Flor de Mayo seem to live for the purpose
of being swallowed up by the sea. When, at the end of the novel, Retor is facing death during the storm, his thoughts concerning the fishermen's lives are purely fatalistic:

Ahora conocía él el engaño de la vida. La única verdad era la muerte, que nunca falta ni engaña. Y también era verdad la hipocresía feroz del mar, que calla sumiso, se deja explotar por los pescadores, los halaga, haciéndoles creer en su eterna bondad, y después, con un zarpazo hoy y otro mañana, los va extirmando de generación en generación. 13

Such an attitude parallels that of the miners in Zola's Germinal. These lower-class creatures who see members of their families die, one by one, either by being crushed in the mines or by contracting consumption from coal dust and from lack of proper nourishment, cannot conceive of any other possible way of existing than by continuing their painful underground labor. The parallel of the fatalistic attitudes of these two classes of people, the fisher-folk and the miners, seems beyond the realm of pure accident.

Blasco Ibáñez seems to uphold his belief in a Divine Being even more in Flor de Mayo than in Arroz y Tartana, thus breaking away a little more from the religious view-point of Zola. When Retor and Tonet purchase their new boat, the Flor de Mayo, they have a priest pronounce a benediction over it in order to insure a life of luck and safety for it and its passengers. The two brothers believed thoroughly in God, and all the people of the fishing quarter believed that, no

matter how poor the fishing, God would protect them. The simple, trusting faith of these unfortunate people is touching, especially in such situations as during the tempest when Tío Batiste says, "Requiescat in pace," and the sailors who are about to meet their inevitable fate answer, "Amén."

Although it is the sea that takes the lives of all these people, Blasco Ibáñez feels that there is something more than just the sea which is to blame for their tragic existence. At the end of the novel, after the catastrophe which takes the lives of the men on board the Flor de Mayo, he turns his back (figuratively speaking) on the sea and looks with scorn toward the visible towers of Valencia, saying:

Allá estaba el enemigo, el verdadero autor de la catástrofe... "¡Que viniesen allí todas las zorras que regateaban al comprar en la Pescadería! ¿Aún les parecía caro el pescado?... ¡A duro debía costar la libra!"

Though there is not as much detailed description in Flor de Mayo as in Arroz y Tartana, the descriptions in the sea-novel are much better than in the author's first novel. The subject matter is more appealing and the language used in the description is more interesting. There is something magnetic and impressive about every line of Flor de Mayo, and it appeals to me as being one of the best of the novels of Blasco Ibáñez's first two periods of writing. One factor which adds a great deal of local color to the novel is the fishermen's dialect that

\[14\] Ibid., p. 264.
appears often in it. Emile Zola thought that the characters for a novel should be observed until their regional dialect could be used appropriately. In this respect Blasco Ibáñez imitates Zola in Flor de Mayo, for he observed the fisher-folk of the Caballal and made use of their dialect to a certain extent. Thus, we see that the influence of Zola's Naturalism is potent in Flor de Mayo.

Just as Blasco Ibáñez seemed to have a surer touch in his second novel, Flor de Mayo, than in his first one, Arroz y Tartana, he seems to improve even more in his third novel, La Barraca, published in 1898. He appears to be gradually discovering his own personal literary method and becoming less needful of guidance by Zola's naturalistic method. This work is a clear portrayal of life among the long-oppressed tillers of the soil of the Valencian huerta, the "garden of Spain." The superstitions and temperaments of these Spanish peasants are shown against the rustic background of the garden soil, over which each inhabitant of the huerta labors for his daily bread and for the respect of his fellow-workers.

The action of La Barraca, which is considered to be the author's masterpiece, concerns the persecution borne by a peasant family. Batiste, an honest, hard-working man who desires nothing more than a small plot of ground where he can earn a living for his family, moves to a piece of land in the Valencian huerta. Because, in the past, the despotic owner of this farm was killed by an oppressed tenant who had been
taxed and goaded beyond all reason, and because the present owner, after persecuting the killer, has refused to be more lenient with the other tenants, the rustic farming people have sworn that no one will be allowed to live on this property and till the soil. They wish to prove to the owners that, without the labor of these overburdened "beasts of the soil," all their lands will grow up in weeds just as this "cursed" land is doing. Batiste, not knowing the hostility and determination of these ignorant peasants, begins to cultivate the property; as a result, he and his worthy family undergo intense suffering and taste defeat in the end.

Pessimism, one of the important features of Naturalism, plays a large part in La Barraca, as it does in the two novels previously considered. This tragic story of a worthy family which is victimized by the ignorant superstitions and the cruel animosity of an entire countryside bound by the forces of tradition and sentiment, ends with a pessimism that is heart-rending. Batiste, who has worked so hard to overcome the curse on his land, and who has tried in vain to gain the respect and friendship which are vital to the life of a happy man, is vanquished by the hateful tricks of an individual adversary. At the close of the novel we see him trudging along the road with what is left of his family, bound for another place in which to begin life anew.
Estaban más solos que en medio de un desierto; el vacío del odio era mil veces peor que el de la Naturaleza. Huirían de allí para comenzar otra vida, sintiendo el hambre tras ellos, pisándoles los talones; dejarían a sus espaldas la ruina de su trabajo y el cuerpo de uno de los suyos.¹⁵

A pitiful example of fatalism in this novel is found when, during the illness of little Pascualet, Batiste's smallest son, the family horse is stabbed by wicked Pimentó. Although Batiste, the older son of Batiste, loves his little brother and is sorry when he dies, he stays in the stable trying to cure the wounded horse which means the very food and clothing of the family. He thinks that the death of his little brother is fated and has no remedy, whereas the horse must be cured so the remainder of the family may eat!

There is a strong belief in God evident throughout the book. The peasants of the huerta salute each other in their dialect with "¡Bén día nos done Deu!" Batiste and his family believe to the very last in the final benevolence of God, who can free them from the burden of hatred that their neighbors have imposed upon them. Blasco Ibáñez, then, in the three novels that have been considered, has not shown any tendency whatever toward the denial of God which is a feature of Zola's Naturalism. He has consistently referred to the existence of a Supreme Power, though he has mentioned several changes that should be made in the customary habits of religious orders.

One of Blasco Ibáñez's main hopes for the world is the education of the masses. This, his philosophy, places the blame of low-class conditions on the masters who keep their laborers ignorant so that they will not think about their life situation. The teacher of the huerta, Don Joaquín, expresses the author's idea fully in the following passage:

¡Pobre gente! ¿Qué culpa tienen si nacieron para bestias y nadie les saca de su condición? . . . Aquí lo que se necesita es instrucción, mucha instrucción. 16

The descriptions in La Barraca show the strong influence of Zola, in their frequency, their length, and the subject matter and language used in them. Nothing could be any more vivid than the minute detail of little Pascualet's gaudy funeral procession. The poverty-stricken school and the behavior of its pupils are described in a true Zolaesque way. Who besides an imitator of Zola's revolting language would have a teacher correct a child who was "hurgándose las narices y haciendo pelotillas"? 17

A fourth regional novel which clearly reproduces the types and customs of the Valencian people, and which conserves the liveliness and freshness of life in Alcira, is Entre Naranjos, published in 1919. It treats of two classes of society. First, it concerns the bourgeois people who have allowed the seeking for money and for social advancement to become their sole ambition, letting themselves become involved

16 Ibid., p. 154. 17 Ibid., p. 108.
in the practices of unjust caciquismo, or political bossism. It concerns also the simple, ignorant orange-grove workers whose sincere faith and occasional religious fanaticism is touching. Rafael Brull, a young deputy and a member of a family of caciques, falls in love with Leonora, an opera singer. Because he is held back by conservatism and a fear that he will lose his property and his authority if he elopes with this girl, Rafael is caught by the ties of tradition, ending up by marrying a girl whom he does not love, having children by her, and gloating over the riches which are gradually poured into his lap.

The romantic story of Rafael's passionate love for Leonora shows a quality in Blasco Ibáñez that originates from his innate personality, and does not receive any of its force from imitation of Emile Zola; for Blasco Ibáñez's treatment of love is not as animalistic as is that of Zola.

The local color in the description of the orange-groves and the regionalism of peasant customs make the detailed observation of this novel have a distinction of its own. Although the descriptions are in accordance with the naturalistic method, they have, at times, wonderful beauty that is seldom attained by Zola.

En el inmenso valle, los naranjales como un oleaje aterciopelado; las cercas y vallados, de vegetación menos obscure, cortando la tierra carmesí en geométricas formas; los grupos de palmeras agitando sus surtidores de plumas, como chorros de
Indeed, Blasco Ibáñez shows an appreciation for the beauties of nature that Zola possesses only slightly and reveals rarely.

Blasco Ibáñez here mentions several ills of modern society, such as the inequality kept alive by caciquismo, and the intoxication of ownership which has become the ruling passion of so many people. He seems to go further in this novel toward the naturalistic belief in science than he has gone heretofore. Criticizing the meaninglessness of so many religious customs, he pictures Doña Bernarda, whose sole ambition is money, praying for her husband to die: "¡Señor! ¡Dios mío! ¡Que se muera pronto este hombre! ¡Que acabe tanto asco!" Detesting the bad effect of Christian mysticism on ignorant people, he describes the sick old woman who believed that the only hope for curing her ailing body was to pray to the Virgen del Lluch. For this purpose, she climbed barefoot every week to the top of the hill on which the little chapel stood. The author shows a feeling of pity toward Doña Pepa, who keeps on living, or vegetating like a plant, without any interest in life except her prayer-book. Moreover, he describes Doctor Moreno as being a decidedly progressive man, in spite of the fact that he is an "infidel," trusting more in science than in God. During one of the

19 Ibid., p. 39.
sessions of Parliament at Madrid, Blasco Ibáñez describes a need for reformation, wishing to use more finances for schools, highways, public works, and railroads, instead of letting so much money be used by the church.

Thus, there is a further change in Blasco Ibáñez's point of view evident in Entre Naranjos, a change which seemingly brings him nearer the acceptance of science that Naturalism advocates, and yet takes him further away from the monotonous handling of uninteresting details. There is, indeed, a great deal of detail in this novel, but it is covered by a veneer of beauty which shields it from the gross crudeness that characterizes all of Emile Zola's writings.

Sónica la Cortesana, published in 1901, cannot be considered among Blasco Ibáñez's regional novels; but since it shows much influence derived from the French naturalistic theory, it must be discussed here. In this novel, Blasco Ibáñez tries the historical genre, producing an artificial story dealing with the siege of ancient Saguntum, three centuries before the birth of Christ. Blasco Ibáñez describes the clashing of the Greek, Roman, and Carthaginian civilizations with a forcefulness which almost compares with Zola's revolting descriptions of war in his La Désâcle. Because the material for this novel was obtained from ancient history; because Blasco Ibáñez, imitating Zola, had a love for accumulated detail; and because there is no life in the characters, Sónica la Cortesana reads like a history book.
It has the appearance of a detailed chronicle, relating scenes and conversations that supposedly took place many centuries before it was written. For this reason, there is a fascinating intrigue about the novel which helps to overcome the over-done details. The fight of the prematurely aged prostitutes with the drunken soldiers who molest them; the description of every particle of clothing worn by the people of the Saguntum port; the detailed relation of Sónnica's bathing, dressing, and perfuming herself; the conversations of the rowdy men visiting the taverns; the description of market day in the Forum; the description of the splendid feast which Sónnica has in her palace for Actaeón; the description of Roman homes and temples and the competing political factions; the epidemics started by the congested population of Saguntum during the siege; the broken-down, starving people fleeing in front of the invaders; the corpses with yellow faces strewn by the wayside along with dead dogs and the skeletons of horses and mules - all these unbelievably long and minutely-treated scenes and ideas are placed before us in Sónnica la Cortesana, and they show their imitation of Zola's detailed studies of horrid topics.

Blasco Ibáñez describes the civilization of this long-past century as wanting governmental and social reformation, as is seen when he discusses the "jóvenes ciudadanos murmurando de los viejos senadores y afirmando que la República
necesitaba hombres más fuertes." And, arguing against the injustices of society even before Christ's time, he writes: "Cerca del templo donde se administraba justicia se establecía el mercado de esclavos." He attacks the idea of people's declaring war at the slightest provocation, saying,

La raza no es más que una ficción; el pueblo un pretexto para hacer la guerra. . . . Nosotros somos hombres de guerra, nos batimos por la gloria, por el poder y las riquezas. Las necesidades de nuestro pueblo sólo sirven para justificar nuestra victoria y para que despojemos al enemigo.

Thus, even in this historical novel, one can observe the author's preoccupation with the desire for political and social reform. He does not try to moralize openly, however, when he presents thoughts like this to us; he is merely presenting both the good and the bad of this civilization so that we may understand the underlying moral.

Zola's idea of man's being the victim of passion, the seeker of carnal love, is brought out by Blasco Ibáñez again in this book. In it, Sónnica, speaking to her lover, Actaeón, says:

Aborrezco a los bárbaros. No es porque desconozcan los esplendores del arte, sino por su odio al amor, que encadenan con toda clase de leyes y preocupaciones. Son hipócritas y deformes: hacen de la reproducción un crimen y aborrecen el desnudo, ocultando su cuerpo

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20 Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, Sónnica la Cortesana, Valencia, Prometeo, Germanías, 33, 1901, p. 63.
21 Ibid., p. 64. 22 Ibid., p. 134.
con toda clase de trapos, como si fuese un espectáculo abominable . . . ¡Cuando el amor sensual, el encuentro de los cuerpos, es el sublime choque de que nacemos, y sin él se seca la fuente de la vida, extinguiéndose el mundo!²³

Another character, Plauto, who has committed "la locura de fundar en Roma el primer teatro a imitación de los de Grecia,"²⁴ has acquired debts and is doing the work of a slave for his creditor. But he is hopeful for the future, a hopefulness which, though obscure, seems to remain to the end of the novel:

Confío en el porvenir. No siempre he de ser esclavo; tal vez encontraré quien me devuelva la libertad. Los romanos que hacen la guerra y ven nuevos países vuelven con más dulces costumbres y aman las artes. Seré libre, fundaré un nuevo teatro, y entonces . . . ¡entonces!²⁵

This novel does not close with the utter hopelessness and pessimism with which the other novels of this period have ended.

Blasco Ibáñez's last Valencian novel, this time a story of the humble folk of primitive economic state who gain their livelihood mostly by fishing and hunting on Lake Albufera, is Cañas y Barro, published in 1902. It portrays an ignorant people who are the product of their community, and describes them in such a powerful and realistic manner that it is one of the important novels of the six in the regional group. The characters live before our eyes, and they bring the

²³Ibid., p. 111  
²⁴Ibid., p. 260.  
²⁵Ibid.
strong plot almost to the high dramatic level reached by Blasco Ibáñez's masterpiece of fisher-life, *Flor de Mayo*.

The story is overladen with detail, as the other novels of this group are. Moreover, the descriptive passages seem to approach more nearly than in the previously considered novels the grossness, crudeness, and sordidness found so often in Emile Zola's works. Just as Zola sometimes describes odors that are actually nauseating, Blasco Ibáñez vividly writes of the postman's boat which carried the Albufera folk to Valencia:

Un hedor insoportable se esparcía en torno de la barca. Sus tablas se habían impregnado del tufo de los cestos de anguilas y de la suciedad de centenares de pasajeros: una mezcla nauseabunda de pieles gelatinosas, escamas de pez criado en el barro, pies sucios y ropas mugrientas, que con su roce habían acabado por pulir y abrillantar los asientos de la barca. 26

He describes meticulously the landscapes, the canals, mud, lakes, rice fields, and mosquitoes around the Albufera, where the fishermen are poverty-stricken, hard-working laborers who are so used to hard lives, sickness, and horrible sights that they laugh coarsely about such things. There is a distinctly Zolaesque element present when Blasco Ibáñez tells of the pitiful lack of good food in the Albufera homes, and of the animal-like pride that these folk have in bragging about their ability to exist on such food. The description of Neleta's baby when it is found, after having been thrown

into the lake by Tonet in order to destroy the evidence of his and Neleta's illegitimate relations, is doubtless done in imitation of Zola. Such a horrible sight, painted in such repulsive diction, could not have come from Blasco Ibáñez's own pen without inspiration from Zola, whose Naturalism he imitated:

Tonet se irguió, con la mirada loca, estremecido de pies a cabeza, como si el aire faltase de pronto en sus pulmones. Vió junto a la borda de su barca un lio de trapos, y en él algo livido y gelatinoso erizado de sanguijuelas: una cabecita hinchada, deformé, negruzca, con las cuencas vacías y colgando de una de ellas el globo de un ojo; todo tan repugnante, tan hediondo, que parecía entenebrar repentinamente el agua y el espacio, haciéndolo que en pleno sol cayese la noche sobre el lago.97

In Cañas y Barro we find a touch of determinism in the attitude of the fisher-folk toward their meager existence on Albufera Lake. They all feel that they must resign themselves to stay there contentedly, for "si hubiesen nacido en un palacio, serían reyes. Cuando Dios les había hecho nacer allí, por algo sería."28 And they trust implicitly that God will modify the ever-increasing population at the hour of need so that there will be sufficient food for all:

Había que alabar al Señor, que se acuerda de los pobres. Era repugnante ver cómo se aumentaban las familias en la miseria; y sin la bondad de Dios, que de vez en cuando aclaraba esta peste de chiquillos, no quedaría en el lago comida para todos y tendrían que devorarse unos a otros.29

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27 Ibid., p. 271
28 Ibid., p. 44.
29 Ibid., p. 33.
So, these poor folk think that even the rate of births and deaths among them is pre-determined by God's will, and that they can do nothing but fall into line with the arrangements made by their Creator.

Sangonera, a drunken character, is symbolical of the falseness of fanatical religion. He is a very "religious" person who knows a great deal about the Bible and can preach and moralize for hours. Yet he stays drunk all the time, refusing to work because this would insult God, who daily places things near his hands to enable him to live! He claims that drunkenness does no one any harm, and that wine is a sacred thing because it is used in church ceremonies. Sangonera, as a tool of Blasco Ibáñez's thoughts, strikes at a tender spot in the church when he says that priests are satisfied with the religious lives of their subjects until the money ceases to roll in, when they begin to complain loudly of the lack of piety and of the rapid degeneration of the souls of the church followers. To add to this criticism of church officials, Blasco Ibáñez, when speaking of pare Miquel, a priest, says: "Su moral era sencilla: residía en el estómago."30 This thought may have come from Zola's idea of the physiological man, whose stomach is just as important as his brain.

Throughout this novel, the author refers to the conflict between the traditional way of living and the modern,

progressive way, and to the backwardness of the marsh people because they refuse to change, preferring to live exactly as they have since their Creator placed them there. At the close of Cañas y Barro, uncle Tóni, burying his dead son, Tonet, realizes the hopeless cycle of his life, which again denotes the pessimistic ending of a naturalistic novel:

Su vida estaba terminada. ¡Tantos años de batalla con el lago, creyendo que formaba una fortuna, y preparando, sin saberlo, la tumba de su hijo! . . .

Hería con sus pies aquella tierra que guardaba la esencia de su vida. Primero la había dedicado su sudor, su fuerza, sus ilusiones; ahora, cuando había que abonarla, la entregaba sus propias entrañas, el hijo, el sucesor, la esperanza, dando por terminada su obra.31

Blasco Ibáñez's first period of writing, from 1894 to 1902, includes the finest of his work. Flor de Mayo, La Barraca, and Cañas y Barro are probably the best of this group because they are wonderfully fresh and vivid, the stories being dramatic and colorful and the characters admirable and appealing. Although the crowding together in episodical fashion of lengthy details is one of the worst characteristics of Zola's naturalistic style, it is this feature of the French writer's method that Blasco Ibáñez imitated most; and it is this feature which makes Arroz y Tartana the weakest of the Valencian novels, its being overburdened with insignificant detail in direct imitation of Zola's Naturalism.

31 Ibid., p. 286.
In these descriptions of Blasco Ibáñez's native Valencia there is a pessimism which is never entirely lifted from the outlook on future life. The misery and suffering of all ranks of society are pictured in an ugly way, and there is no solution advanced for social improvement except that of gradual education, a process which would take too many years for anything particularly optimistic to develop from the idea. Blasco Ibáñez got his pessimism, his determinism, his fatalism, his love of accumulated detail, and his ability to manipulate huge panoramas and handle whole masses of characters from Emile Zola's naturalistic method. But in spite of their similar philosophies, their style and technique of writing are quite different.

Blasco Ibáñez's early tendency toward the collection of series of insignificant, detailed descriptions in his novels gradually decreases during this period, although this tendency is still quite evident even at the end of it, after Cañas y Barro. Strangely enough, Blasco Ibáñez himself said that except for the Zolaesque influence in Arroz y Tartana, the novels of his first period of writing resented the French naturalistic influence.\(^{32}\) It is evident that, after Arroz y Tartana, his regional novels do go farther and farther.

away from the Zolaesque model, becoming all the while more individual and less grossly realistic. There are, indeed, so many individual characteristics in the writings of Blasco Ibáñez that he is unmistakably a novelist who need not be linked with any particular writer or movement in order to justify his place in the literary world.
CHAPTER IV

THE NOVELS OF BLASCO IBÁÑEZ'S SECOND PERIOD
OF WRITING

During his first period of writing, Blasco Ibáñez's thoughts were centered on the people of the Valencian region, their customs and their problems. When he went to Madrid as a deputy to the Parliament, however, his views naturally broadened. Through his associations in the governmental body, he came in closer contact with other parts of Spain; and through his increased interest in national government and politics, his vision widened, and he began to include national social problems in his novels. Because, in this second series, he wished to display and spread his political views, subordinating the description and the realistic element of the Valencian novels to a new note of political propaganda, the novels of Blasco Ibáñez's second period are considered sociological, or thesis novels.

The characters, plots, style - everything in these doctrinary novels is subordinated to problems of social decadence which he attacks. His art is sacrificed to the needed propaganda, and in seeking to become a novelist of all Spain rather than of Valencia alone, he loses much of his former power, which came from close observation of his native province. Writing with sincerity and enthusiasm, he
attacks the easy-going Spanish life, the national decadence, the traditional church evils, and the social injustices, with the poverty and degeneration arising from them. Since criticisms of social problems like these appear often in Blasco Ibáñez's first group of novels, he may be said to have shown tendencies all along toward these ulterior doctrinal novels. But it is not until this series begins, with La Catedral, that his entire energy is devoted to the spreading of propaganda for social improvement.

There was very little attention paid to the plot of La Catedral, published in 1903, because it was written primarily as a tool for the author's attacks upon the established order of Spanish society. The setting of the novel is the Toledo Catholic cathedral. The story portrays the lack of charitable kindness in the scholarly church officials, who seek more and more wealth for themselves and their religious practices, while within sight of their sanctuary live hundreds of poverty-stricken, ignorant human beings who can barely exist on the food which they are able to obtain. It tells of the vain attempts which a revolutionary social reformer, Gabriel Luna, makes to help bring these pathetic individuals up to a more nearly decent level of society; it shows the hopelessness of such a task as long as religious and political tyranny oppresses the poor and forces them to be victimized by the inequalities of modern civilization.
La Catedral is filled with condemnation of the conservative spirit which hovers over the Catholic Cathedral at Toledo; it protests against the superstitions engendered by the despotic church in the minds of ignorant people; it portrays the poverty-stricken families who gain a bare existence from working for the church; it contrasts with these wretched toilers the wealth and happiness of the few privileged thousands who reap most of the wealth which the church gets by taxing the oppressed lower class. It makes much of the fact that the church doors are locked at night; that the church officials ask a small fee from visitors who wish to inspect this ancient sanctuary, the cradle of Spanish Catholicism; and that God-fearing travellers must pay to enter this Catholic church just as they pay for a grand-stand seat at a bullfight.

Gabriel Luna, a character in La Catedral, while yet a boy, left the shelter of the Toledan Cathedral where he grew up, and joined the "army of the Faith." Since, in every town to which these "religious" troops came, they would plunder, kill, curse, and cry "¡Viva la religión!" all in one breath, Gabriel lost all his faith in the practices of the church. Then, on going to France and seeing that French Catholicism was more humane, and seeing that it respected human progress and scientific advancement, he spread out progressive propaganda among the poor of his own country. This forbidden practice brought the Spanish law in search of him.
In order to escape imprisonment by Spanish officials, Gabriel, in the development of this novel, returns to the Toledan Cathedral where he spent his boyhood, thinking:

En plena época de descreimiento, la iglesia le serviría de lugar de asilo, como a los grandes criminales de la Edad Media, que desde lo alto del claustro se burlaban de la justicia, detenida en la puerta como los mendigos.¹

Blasco Ibáñez's idea of the injustice of the church is brought out again in the pitiful story of Sagrario's life. Having run off and lived with a young cadet and then having been deserted by him, Sagrario is left to her own fate by her relatives, who are all closely connected with the church. They think that bringing a disgraced person like this back to live among them would ruin their honor. And when Gabriel, who exemplifies real justice, finds her and brings her back where she can live a quiet, decent life, her father refuses to accept her as a member of his family. This shows that in spite of all the kindness that religion should bring to people's hearts, even the highest church officials refuse to administer much-needed help and sympathy to unfortunate human beings. Such is the so-called strength and charity of the church, according to Blasco Ibáñez. Gabriel, who is the mouthpiece of the author in this novel, realizes all the weaknesses of the Spanish church as it has developed under Catholic despotism:

¹Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, La Catedral, Valencia, Prometeo, Germanías, 32, 1916, p. 35.
La catedral era para Gabriel un gigantesco tumor que hinchaba la epidermis española como rastro de antiguas enfermedades... No era un músculo capaz de desarrollo: era un absceso que aguardaba la hora de ser extirpado o de disolverse por los gérmenes mortales que llevaba en su interior.²

He says, in one of his lengthy criticisms of the church:

En España, tres siglos de intolerancia, de excesiva presión clerical, han hecho de nuestra nación la más indiferente en materia religiosa. Se siguen las ceremonias del culto por rutina, porque hablan a la imaginación, pero nadie se toma el trabajo de conocer el fundamento de las creencias que profesa; se acepta todo sin reflexionar, se vive a gusto, con la seguridad de que a última hora basta morir entre sacerdotes, con un crucifijo en la mano, para salvar el alma.³

Throughout the pages of this novel, Gabriel Luna discusses the faults of church policies and the subsequent suffering caused among the blind followers of fanatical religion. When someone asks him what God really is, his answer indicates the influence of the scientific attitude of Zola's Naturalism:

Dios somos nosotros y todo lo que nos rodea.... Es la materia, que vive animada por la fuerza que reside en ella, con absoluta unidad, sin separación ni dualidades. El hombre es Dios; el mundo es Dios también. ... Ese Dios ... surgió del cerebro del hombre, y el cerebro es el órgano más reciente del ser humano, el último en desarrollarse ... Cuando inventaron a Dios, la Tierra existía millones de años.⁴

As in the other novels that have been studied, Blasco Ibáñez expresses in La Catedral the idea that seeking for money is what is causing the decadence of society. Aside from thinking that the church has lost itself, its funda-

mental faith, and its followers because of its avaricious-

ness, he says:

Es el dinero, ¡el maldito dinero! quien mata la
parte más hermosa del soldado, el valor personal, la
iniciativa, la originalidad, así como anula el obrero,
convirtiendo su existencia en un infierno.5

A clear example of Emile Zola's theory of the physiologi-
cal man is found in the conversation of Don Sebastián, a

cardinal in the church, and Tomasa, the gardener's wife.

Don Sebastián says:

Me gusta la mujer religiosa, no la devota que
sólo se encuentra bien en la iglesia. La mujer debe
vivir, debe gozar y ser madre. Siempre he mirado
mal a las monjas.6

In agreement with the cardinal's words, Tomasa answers:

No hay que arrepentirse de haber seguido el
impulso del corazón. Dios nos hizo a su imagen y
semejanza, y por algo nos puso el sentimiento de la
familia. Lo demás, castidad, celibato y otras zaran-
dajas, lo inventaron ustedes para distinguirse del
común de las gentes. Sea usted hombre, don Sebastián,
que cuanto más lo sea, resultará más bueno y mejor lo
acogerá el Señor en su gloria.7

Thus, Blasco Ibáñez says that even church officials, who are

supposed to deny themselves any physical pleasures, feel the

need of bodily expression. And if human beings are denied

this expression because of social or religious laws, they

will find it secretly and hide it with hypocrisy.

The fatalism and determinism of Naturalism are also

found in this novel of Blasco Ibáñez, though not to a great

extent. When the shoemaker's child, suffering from malnu-

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5 Ibid., p. 260. 6 Ibid., p. 274.
7 Ibid., pp. 276-277.
trition, dies of starvation in spite of the fact that it lives within sight of the church where there are so many jewels and golden ornaments, the well-to-do women living within the cathedral walls say "¡Todo sea por Dios!" and grudgingly give the mother of the child some money for the care of her living children. They all feel that this poverty is God's will, and they make no attempt whatever to raise stricken families from their low economic level. They think that God gives the higher-class people enough to eat, and if he meant for all families to be well-fed, He would take care of them.

A note of pessimism lies in the last paragraph of the novel, when Gabriel, just because he is a known enemy of the social order, is assumed to be the criminal who robbed the cathedral of its jewels. Because he is dead and cannot prove his innocence, he becomes another martyr for an ideal. Only the earth which had given him life, and to which he had devoted most of this life in attempting improvement, knew the secret of his death. All his work had been for nothing.

In this novel Blasco Ibáñez's remedy for the faults of human society is in agreement with modern progress and the

8 Ibid., p. 340.
science of Naturalism. He does not suggest any moral or any reformation that could be made by mankind; instead, he recognizes that all social ills must be overcome by society itself, aided by progress and science. Gabriel Luna, expressing the author's solution, says:

Yo no tengo remedio alguno. Es la marcha de la humanidad la que lo ofrece. Todos los pueblos de la tierra han pasado por las mismas evoluciones. Primero fueron regidos por la espada, después por la fe, y ahora por la ciencia.  

But the answer of Don Antolín, a representative of the eternally conservative Spanish church, is pessimistic in that it shows the harsh conflict that progress will always have to face:

¡Bah! ¡la ciencia! ... Conozco eso. Es la eterna música de todos los enemigos de la religión. No hay mejor ciencia que amar a Dios y sus obras.  

La Catedral opens with a fine picture of the Toledan cathedral. All the descriptions of the novel, however, are not as good as this, because they have not the life and the feeling that so many of his descriptions of Valencia have. Blasco Ibáñez does not seem to experience the beauty of the Toledan scenes as he does the scenes of his own region, which he observes so minutely and clearly. Thus, a great many of the detailed studies of this novel are like the impersonal, irrelevant sketches so often found in Zola's writings. They do not add to the beauty of the story's background, and the

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9 Ibid., p. 207.  
10 Ibid.
story itself is neglected because of them. Even though there are scores of worth-while social criticisms in this novel, and though examples here and there of the elements of Zola's Naturalism make it rather interesting, (though not as a work of fiction), *La Catedral* is spoiled by too much political propaganda and too much insignificant detail.

A second controversial novel, published in 1904, is *El Intruso*. A story of life in the mines and in the city of Bilbao, it attacks Jesuitism, and shows the harm that the influence of the church has done to Spanish intellectual development and scientific thought. It shows the pathetic living and working conditions of miners who toil and starve in order that the capitalists may thrive and become powerful. The sordid, grimy atmosphere around the mines serves as a good background for this description of the frail, dirty, overworked and underfed individuals who labor and waste their lives away in the cold, damp, underground passages.

There is one particular chapter of this novel which describes the same type of wretched circumstances that is described all through Emile Zola's *Germinal*, also a novel of mining life. It is impossible to say whether Blasco Ibáñez actually imitated Zola's *Germinal*, or whether the two writers were simply products of the same age, with the same material for observation near at hand. At any rate, Blasco Ibáñez's description, though detailed, is not as minutely so as that of Zola. Thus, the mining story by the Spanish author is
not so pathetic as that of the French author, because the more revolting topics are passed over more quickly without so much time spent on the detail which produces the tension in Zola's writings. In describing the awful conditions in which the miners sleep, Blasco Ibáñez wrote:

Vió un cuartucho .. . obstruido completamente por un enorme camastro formado con tablas sin cepillar y varios banquillos. En él dormía toda la banda de Zamora, siete hombres y el muchacho, en mutuo contacto, sin separación alguna, sin más aire que el que entraba por la puerta y las grietas de la techumbre. .. . Pensó con tristeza en las noches transcurridas en este tugurio.11

There is a description in El Intruso of the horrible deaths of trapped miners, just as there is in Germinal. Blasco Ibáñez's descriptions of the catastrophe are not as minute as those of Zola, however, and, for that reason, they are not so horrible and gripping.

In El Intruso, Blasco Ibáñez moves huge mobs about with skill. We see in our mind's eye the activity of hundreds of people about the mine: men load and unload tons of coal with the enormous crane; women wash their clothes in a stream which is grimy with the leaden color of coal-dust. The author handles the kindled temperaments of hundreds of dissatisfied miners who attend socialistic meetings and draw up petitions; he describes a country festival where the miners show every phase of their basic nature; he directs the mutinous miners through a mass fight and shows them

tearing down sacred decorations and trying to burn the church. It was from Zola that Blasco Ibáñez got the idea and the model for creating characters in a mass, and for directing these characters in mob-meetings directed toward an attempted upheaval of the social order.

The people that Blasco Ibáñez describes in this novel have primitive ideals and emotions. He displays the passivity of the miners, who never protest against their living-conditions, and he depicts "la humildad de aquella gente, dura para el trabajo, habituada a las privaciones, sin la más leve vegetación de ideas de protesta en su cerebro estéril."

He describes Charanga, the dissolute girl who feels no emotion whatever when her husband-to-be is murdered by her lover, as being "¡la hermosa bestia de los tiempos primitivos, satisfecha de que los machos se maten por poseerla!"

The bad effect of fanatical religion on the happiness of married life is brought out in the discussion of Sanchez Morueta's home life. Because his wife, Cristina, has devoted her energy to obedience to the church and her father confessor, she scorns all further intimacy with her husband, thinking that her flesh must be kept innocent and holy for the approval of God.

Para ella, la pasión matrimonial no debía ir más allá de la intimidad fría y casi mecánica de

12 Ibid., p. 18. 13 Ibid., p. 15.
sus primeros tiempos de vida común. El matrimonio era para que el hombre y la mujer viviesen sin escándalo, procreando hijos que sirvieran a Dios, y también para que no se perdiese la fortuna de la familia. Lo que llamaban amor las personas corrompidas era un pecado repugnante, propio de gentes sin religión.14

In agreement with Zola's idea of the physiological man and his need for bodily satisfaction, Blasco Ibáñez dislikes intensely this superficial attitude; he shows no contempt, nothing but approval for Sanchez Morueta's seeking love outside his legitimate home relationship.

Dr. Aresti, a modern thinker in El Intruso, is an advocate of science, but he knows that progress must not be too rapid if it is to succeed. He believes that justice should be the only religion and law, and that charity in religious policy should be abolished if the workingman is to obtain his liberty. He sees the wealth of the church as the result of the misery of the rabble and the practices and ostentation of the few; and he experiences deep-felt sympathy for the nameless workers who, after devoting their lives to making the town-people rich, either meet their death in the mine which has taken the strength of their lives, or live on in poverty with no consolation but the few pennies given them grudgingly by charity.

¡La caridad! . . . Es el medio de sostener la pobreza, de fomentarla, haciéndola eterna. Los

14 Ibid., pp. 111-112.
desgraciados la odian por instinto, evitan el buscarla mientras pueden, viendo en ella una institución degradante que perpetúa su esclavitud. Ese es otro de los grandes fracasos de la moral cristiana.  

It is a pessimistic picture which the author paints of the miners' lives. But it becomes even more pessimistic when he says that the privileged classes use religion, that binding factor of humanity, as a shield to keep the underprivileged classes from rising from their oppression and gaining their human rights. The following quotation shows their deterministic outlook on their pathetic lives:

Los privilegiados empleaban la religión como un escudo. «Nada de esperar en la tierra la justicia para todos. Estaba en manos de Dios, y había que ir a la otra vida para encontrarla.»  

Blasco Ibáñez blames Jesuitism and the ideas it has engendered, for many social injustices. He thinks it is an intruder which has wedged into all parts of Spanish society without being seen; and, though it cannot be seen, all Spaniards feel the blighting effect of its presence. To him, the church is an invisible enemy. So, instead of worshipping religion, he conforms with the naturalistic theory and worships science as the means to salvation and social justice.

Though most of the ideas expounded in El Intruso are pessimistic toward future hopefulness, the end of the novel has an optimistic note. It predicts a day when people will

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15 Ibid., p. 259.  
16 Ibid.
not be slaves of the religion which makes them resign themselves to all earthly injustice:

Aquellos ídolos habían engañado a la humanidad demasiado tiempo, y debían morir. . . . Quedarían en los museos, entre las divinidades del pasado, feos y vulgares, sin lograr siquiera la admiración que inspira la armoniosa desnudez; se confundirían con los fetiches grotescos de los pueblos primitivos; y la humanidad . . . adoraría en el infinito de su idealismo las dos únicas divinidades de la nueva religión: la Ciencia y la Justicia social.17

This seems to me to be the first time that any of the novels studied has had an optimistic outlook for the future. The slightly optimistic attitude shown in El Intruso, however, is so far ahead of the actual existence of the improved social conditions that it may be said to be a lesser degree of pessimism, rather than real optimism.

The third of this group of novels dealing with social questions is La Bodega, published in 1905. A study of the wine-manufacturing district at Jérez, in Andalucía, its thesis is against alcoholism. It portrays the dangerous frivolity and the moral laxness which, caused partially by the excessive use of alcohol, is found among the well-to-do wine manufacturers and landowners. It shows how this weakness causes educated people, who rightfully should be strong enough to help lead the ignorant, almost starving peasants and laborers out of their hopeless existence, to forget their needs and, instead, to do things which make

17 Ibid., pp. 342-343.
their living-conditions even more unbearable. Arguing against alcohol's being sold to these workingmen who should spend their money for nourishment, it explains how the poverty-stricken people, when they are on the verge of rebelling and demanding their rights, find solace in the momentarily-stimulating drink which makes them forget their oppression and dream foolishly of a reformation which may come in the very near future. Because there is less actual preaching in this book than there has been in the second-period novels already discussed, there is more attention paid to the story development. The outcome of the story itself proves the author's thesis, without very much preaching being needed from his pen.

In *La Bodega*, there are scenes dealing with the masses which are so skillfully done as to be astounding. These people who have long been oppressed, and who have been held off from rebellion by the despotic rule of the Catholic church, finally break the bonds which have held them and march on Jérez, ready to storm it, plunder it, and free their revolutionary leaders from prison. The technique used in writing of this mob clearly obtains its origin from Emile Zola.

It seems to me that the descriptions of this book, aside from retaining the minute treatment which Blasco Ibáñez imitated from Zola, take on a more gripping, more detailed, and more repulsive form than is to be found in the two pre-
ceding novels. The author, because he is discussing more or less the same ideas (social problems and improvement) in all his sociological novels, seems to have run out of the shocking, powerfully realistic expression of which he has made so much use; and, in order to keep on producing astonishing and spectacular scenes in this novel, he falls back on the needlessly revolting language of Emile Zola. In describing the pitiful bodies of the overworked toilers in the vineyards, he writes:

Bajo los sombreros deformes sólo se veían carátulas de miseria, máscaras de sufrimiento y de hambre. . . . Mostraban un envejecimiento prematuro, arruinados en plena madurez . . . con la resignación del que sólo aguarda la muerte como única libertad.18

Las mujeres aún ofrecían un aspecto más doloroso. Unas eran gitanas viejas y horribles como brujas, con la piel tostada y cobriza, que parecía haber pasado por el fuego de todos los aquelarres. Las jóvenes tenían la hermosura dolorosa y desmayada de la anemia; flores de vida que se mustiaban antes de abrirse. . . . El trabajo, la fatiga bestial, habían paralizado el desarrollo de la gracia femenina.19

Blasco Ibáñez must have been thinking of some of Zola's nauseating wording when he described the death of Mari-Cruz:

Un velo parecía flotar ante sus ojos, empequeñeciendo las pupilas. Su respiración tenía el burbujeo del hervor, como si en su garganta tropezase el aire con el obstáculo de extrañas materias. . . . La vieja . . . la daba de beber, y el agua caía en el estómago ruidosamente; . . . cho-


19 Ibid., pp. 132-133.
caba en las paredes del esófago paralizado, haciéndolas sonar cual si fuesen de pergamo. El rostro perdía sus rasgos generales; se ennegrecían las mejillas; aplastaban las sienes; se adelgazaba la nariz con frío afilamiento; la boca torcía a un lado con una mueca horrible. . . . En uno de los estremecimientos sacó de su envoltura de harapos un pie descarnado y pequeño, completamente negro. La falta de circulación aglomeraba la sangre en las extremidades. Las orejas y las manos se ennegreían igualmente.

Not all of the descriptions, however, are revolting. That of the wine factory, the cellar with its flasks and kegs, the various kinds of drinks made and the year of their bottling, the principal depository - all of these, though minutely detailed like the monotonous work of Zola, show an interesting touch and a style which is very clearly original with Blasco Ibáñez.

Again in this novel does the author present the many faults of society which have derived from religious fanaticism. He pictures the "Christian" humility of the oppressed, who want to torture and starve themselves because Christ underwent such suffering; he presents the idea that many centuries have passed without fulfillment of anything Christ promised; he complains of the damage done by the Catholic church's preaching that Christ will rise, showing that this idea makes oppressed people submissive and willing to wait all their lives for a freedom which, in reality, will never come. Blasco Ibáñez wants people to live now, and not take the chance of a happy after-life. Although doña Elvira

\[20\] Ibid., pp. 236-237.
does not approve of the wine-manufactory, she is satisfied with every bit of the evil of the business if she is allowed each year to send a cask of wine to Rome for the Pope's use. This, to her, makes wine a holy beverage. And because the offices of the wine establishment are crowded with figurines of the apostles and saints, and because the solera is decorated like a cathedral, religious people get the idea that the use of wine is a devout practice.

Blasco Ibáñez, however, is very much against the use of alcoholic drinks. He writes of the cursed effect of drink on the toilers: it gladdens their lives for the moment, making them dream of things which may come; it makes them forget momentarily the injustices of the world, and causes them to submit once more to the control of the masters.

¡El vino! ... Ese es el mayor enemigo de este país: mata las energías, crea engañosas esperanzas, acaba con la vida prematuramente; todo lo destruye: hasta el amor. ... Es la enfermedad de la tierra.21

The influence of Zola's "physiological man" is found again in La Bodega. Blasco Ibáñez describes the shepherds of the mountains, whose primitive existence makes them resemble the animals they watch. With almost every human attribute extinguished, these men have only two hungers: they want plenty of food and the flesh of woman; their one ambition is to get married, to quench their desires to the fullest extent, and then to die happy.

21 Ibid., p. 199.
There are a number of pessimistic references to society in this novel, although its ending is rather optimistic. When Rafael and María, fleeing from the injustices of Spain, leave for America, Fernando Salvatierra, who is the representative of modern progress in *La Bodega*, regrets the fact that all the unhappy individuals of Spain cannot escape the oppression of their too-conservative mother country. He says: "El mundo es demasiado grande para los pobres, siempre inmovilizados en el mismo sitio por las raíces de la necesidad." But Salvatierra's final thought is optimistic:

Salvatierra sintió que se desvanecía su cólera, que la esperanza y la fe volvían a él. Comenzaba a caer la tarde; llegaba la noche, como precursora de un nuevo día. También el crepúsculo de las aspiraciones humanas era momentáneo. La Justicia y la Libertad dormitaban en la conciencia de todo hombre. Ellas despertarían . . . Rebeldía Social . . .

Again in *La Horda*, published in 1905, Blasco Ibáñez hurls bitter denunciation at certain features of the Spanish social system: the poverty and degeneration of the submerged classes of Madrid; the inability of these classes to get out from under the heavy weight which the monarchial government has unflinchingly held over them, ever keeping them from breathing the same kind of air which the middle class breathes. In a note to the reader at the beginning, the author writes:

Estaba convencido de la inutilidad de mis funciones de diputado republicano dentro de una Cámara fabricada por los monárquicos, en la que

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resultaban inútiles razonamientos y demostraciones, pues el argumento más convincente no torcería una opinión, ni quitaría un voto al gobierno. 24

This story of the slums of Madrid, where starving waifs crawl and beg for a living denied to them by a civilization of selfish money-grabbers, is interesting on account of its intensely realistic descriptions. Blasco Ibáñez thinks that it is one of his most realistic works:

Ninguna de mis obras tiene una base tan amplia en la realidad. No existe un solo personaje en La Horda, ni aun los más secundarios, sin su correspondiente hermano de carne y hueso. Ninguna tampoco de mis novelas fue precedida de una preparación tan minuciosa. 25

He did, indeed, do so much observation and preparation before writing this novel that he follows the naturalistic tendencies of Emile Zola and includes frequent, ugly descriptions that weary the reader. As in the preceding novel, La Bodega, he seems to think that the only thing left for him to do in order to produce the unusual effect that he desires, is to make use of the crude and brutal Naturalism of Zola. And he becomes so wrapped up in his descriptions, which follow each other in rapid succession, that he introduces digressions which are entirely unnecessary.

The local color of Madrid that appears here and there in the lengthy descriptions, however, preserves the basic interest of the book. In the opening chapter, we see the

25 Ibid., p. 8.
carreteros coming at early dawn to Madrid, which is still "envuelto en la bruma del despertar,"\textsuperscript{26} to sell their wares at the market. They are poorly-dressed people whose appearance shows that they live hard lives, and whose animals, drawing their rickety carts, show that there is not too much to eat among them all. We learn that Isidro Maltrana, who works in a printing office each night, goes home weary each morning to climb into the only bed in his house, a bed which is always still warm from the bodies of his stepfather and his younger brother. We watch young girl-workers pass by on their way to the poorly-paid labor which, added to their hereditary anemia, has caused them such privations that their development is slow and difficult. When Isidro and Feliciana, both individuals of the lower class, go to buy furniture for their new lodging, we view every vendedor of the market and the things each has to sell; every fly and speck of dirt is given its due consideration in the minute description. In this descriptive Zolaesque novel, Blasco Ibáñez tells even of Isidro and Feliciana's first day together, and of their going to bed at night. There is a description of the Madrid jail, its bars, its guards, and its prisoners, that is almost too realistic and colorful for comfort. The living conditions of the horda are pictured so realistically that one can almost see the poverty-stricken district, with the

\textsuperscript{26}Ibid., p. 13.
children dying of hunger, and the gypsies who could not exist there were it not that their bodies are accustomed to hardship.

A touch of local color is seen in the description of a gypsy wedding, and the explanation of the gypsy law that a girl should marry at eleven or twelve years of age; and, if her husband should die, she should always be a widow. As an example of the author's descriptive power of the sense of smell, let us note the following quotation about the streets of the slum-district:

En las estrechas calles de los barrios bajos, el mal olor del verano martirizaba el olfato. La plaza de la Cebada humeaba como un estercolero en putrefacción. De sus sótanos, faltos de aire, surgía la peste de las verduras fermentadas, difundiéndose por toda esta parte de Madrid, que olía como una huerta abandonada. 27

In many instances, Blasco Ibáñez complains of the suffering of the proletariat of Madrid. Isidro Maltrana, the revolutionary character of La Horda who expresses the author's thoughts, objects to the economy which allows an aristocracy to attend the opera in all its finery and jewels, and yet does nothing about the poverty of oppressed human-beings:

¡Una injusticia - exclamó -; un abuso! ... Este terreno no es suyo; aquí no son más que unos particulares como vosotros ó como yo. Pero pertenecen a la «casa grande», y no hay tribunal ni Dios que no se ponga de su parte. 28

27 Ibid., pp. 259-260.  
28 Ibid., p. 99.
Maltrana laughs at the idea of Catholic socialism, which advocates the following idea as a means of social salvation: "que los ricos diesen a los pobres, que los pobres respetasen a los ricos, y unos y otros se confiaran a la dirección de la Iglesia católica."\(^2\)

He regrets that centralization is the source of trouble, causing people who have talent to die of hunger because they can obtain no job where they can use their talent; he realizes, too, that he himself is one of those who, "nutridos de griego y de latín, están muertos de hambre."\(^3\)

Blasco Ibáñez, although he has never actually moralized in any of the novels previously considered, seems to me to present a moral in this study of social problems. Though he displays no particular political doctrine here, he does present a solution which he feels will take la horda from its pitiful circumstances. Maltrana, the progressive character of the book, wonders what la horda lacks. He finally decides that it lacks leaders and people who, instead of giving themselves and their services up to the rich, will stay within their own rank and organize their fellow-sufferers for a rebellion.

¡Si los siervos de la pobreza, como él, en vez de ofrecerse cobardemente a los poderosos, se quedasen entre los suyos, poniendo a su servicio lo que habían aprendido, esforzándose en regimenter a la horda, dándola una bandera, fundiendo sus bravías independencias en una voluntad común!\(^3\)

\(^2\)Ibid., p. 137.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 255.  
\(^3\)Ibid., p. 367.
This moralizing makes La Horda seem to be more in imitation of Zola than the other novels have been.

Disregarding the pessimism of Zola's Naturalism, however, Blasco Ibáñez has an optimistic ending for this novel. Maltrana, feeling a new hope because he has a son to live and work for, is determined to make his child a part of the privileged class - to set his child on the top layer of the unequal social order. This baby is his only inheritance; his only force; his promise for the future.

The first four novels of the author's second period of writing deal with the worst social problems of several Spanish cities: Toledo, Bilbao, Jérez, and Madrid. In the last three novels of the series, however, he turns his attention to psychological problems and includes these in his stories. La Maja Desnuda, published in 1906, is a curious study of psychological influences on the life of a painter, Mariano Renovales, who has an artistic mind which is easily upset by emotional strain.

In the course of the story, Renovales visits the Museo del Prado in Madrid day after day, studying carefully the artistic work of Velásquez and Goya. He reflects that he himself is like Velásquez, painting just to be painting, with no particular objective except to reproduce nature exactly and mechanically, without any inner-felt urge to do something artistically beautiful. Then Renovales finds himself attracted to the paintings of Goya, who has felt an
urge to reproduce beauty; Goya's figures of nude women impress him as being especially beautiful, and it is this artistic obsession which dominates his entire life. He strives to create something to compare with the beauty of Goya's nude women; but his ideal is too high and his need of seeing that which he paints, copying nature in minute detail, prevents his last attempt from being the ideally beautiful creation which he desires.

There is a touch of fatalism in La Maja Desnuda, as is seen in Renovales's submission to the narrowness of modern art: "Cada hombre debía seguir su destino, aceptando la vida tal como se presentaba."32 Blasco Ibáñez's pessimism is shown in the painter's final decision to forego all desires, dreams, and youthful pleasures, waiting sorrowfully until death frees his crushed soul. Since fatalism and pessimism are characteristics of the naturalistic theory, this idea of having to wait until destiny brings man to an inevitably unhappy ending may result from the influence of Zola.

Renovales feels that religion considers physical love a sin, when in reality it is the joy of life. When in his later years he suffers the death of his wife and needs her love to make his painting successful once more, he becomes a rake and lives a scandalous life, devoting his time to

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32 Vicente Blasco Ibáñez, La Maja Desnuda, Valencia, Prometeo, Germanías, 33, 1919, p. 135.
vulgar pleasures. He does not succumb to his desire for the flesh of woman, however, and for this reason he is half mad. This example shows Zola's idea of the animalism of man's basic nature.

It has occurred to me that Blasco Ibáñez may have used Renovales's attempted transition from the realistic to the idealistic as an expression of his own life struggle; the young painter was trained in realistic art, and then tried in vain to overcome this method in order to do something idealistically beautiful. Could it be possible that Blasco Ibáñez, after following the tendencies of Naturalism which Zola's influence in Spain placed before him, was sorry that he had imitated Zola's excessively realistic writings, and tried to break away from Naturalism to take up a different literary method? It seems to me that he did find a type of writing all his own in the last three novels of the second series. But it is impossible to say whether this gradual breaking away from Zola was willful, or a natural product of maturation; we cannot know whether Blasco Ibáñez wished to break further away from Naturalism than he did, nor whether, in *La Maja Desnuda*, he was seeking to write a novel which would defy all the influences of Zola. Although there are criticisms in this novel of the unhealthy influence of fanatical religion on art; of the backwardness of Spain and Spanish society's love of extravagance; although there are occasions when fatalism is suggested; when vulgar pleasures
of the body are mentioned—these Zolaesque tendencies are not strong enough to make it wise to say that *La Maja Desnuda* is influenced greatly by Zola. There is an entirely new atmosphere about the theme and style of the novel, even though there is still a suggestion of Zola's Naturalism through it all.

Blasco Ibáñez's most spectacular novel, a *novela de costumbres*, is his *Sangre y Arena*, published in 1908. A detailed study of the habits, adventures, and the emotional and psychological life of bullfighters, it displays objectively every detail of the national sport of Spain. The main part of the story has its setting in and around Seville. It tells of a bullfighter from the lower middle class who, acquiring fame and becoming associated with the would-be socialites of the upper middle class, falls in love with a loose society woman, *doña* Sol. Being jilted by her, the bullfighter, Juan Gallardo, loses his spirit and enthusiasm and is gored by a bull. Then, because he cannot overcome his fear of the animals he fights, because his conscience hurts him for injuring his devoted wife by being unfaithful, and because he is greatly upset at the thought of being spurned by the woman he loves, he cannot gain his former grasp on the world. His finally losing his life during a bullfight is the indirect result of the psychological influence which Sol has had on his life.
Although Blasco Ibáñez intended for this to be a novel of protest against the cruel national sport of Spain and against the bestial crowds that watch this bloody activity, he does not attack the custom of bullfighting until the last page of the book. Rather, he analyzes the national development of amusement and shows that bullfighting is a step ahead of the earlier orgies of the Inquisition.

¡Que las corridas de toros son bárbaras! Conforme; pero no son la única fiesta bárbara del mundo. La vuelta a los placeres violentos y salvajes es una enfermedad humana que todos los pueblos sufren por igual. Por eso yo me indigno cuando veo a los extranjeros fijar sus ojos en España, como si sólo aquí existiesen fiestas de violencia. 33

Through Dr. Ruiz's words the author seems at first to excuse the brutal interests of Spanish audiences. But in the end his character "Nacional," who is one of Gallardo's banderilleros at the bullfights, picks out the fault that lies behind the cruel killing of animals and men in the Spanish national sport:


Rugía la fiera: la verdadera, la única. 34

None other of Blasco Ibáñez's novels of the first two periods is as full of description as is Sangre y Arena.

The colorful sights, the bustling activity, the dangerous


34 Ibid., p. 396.
escapades, and the gruesome accidents which are seen during the corridas de toros, are alive and brilliant. In this novel the author uses his most picturesque style. We are given a careful picture of Gallardo's getting dressed in his flashy raiment and then being carried to the plaza in a fashionable coach; we see vividly the bullfighters entering the plaza, going through all their parade and formality; we can almost visualize the viciousness and cruelty of every moment of the bullfights, and the colors, sounds, and smells that are a part of the corrals where the bulls are kept; we learn of the almost unbelievable pride that the Spaniards have in their fine bulls; we read all the details of a horse or a man's being gored by a bull, and we can almost see the depth and size of the wound as it is described to us; we realize the stoic indifference to suffering that characterizes the multitude which watches this murderous "entertainment."

Gallardo is an ignorant, superstitious man who is fanatically religious. Before he goes to fight, he stops for a few moments in a chapel and kneels before the Saints, asking their protection during his perilous performance. He takes part in a religious procession of Semana Santa, dressed, as all the other members of his brotherhood, in Saint's apparel. He covers the statues of the Virgins and Saints with all the jewels and riches of his family, while his wife wears simple clothing and goes with her arms bare of jewels in honor of
the saintly celebration. The author portrays the most emotional, ignorant, excited fanaticism imaginable in Sangre y Arena; and it is only in the speeches of the banderillero, "Nacional," that he criticizes too much fanaticism and shows his disbelief in many ideas preached by religious orders.

¿La Biblia? . . . ¡líquido! ¿Lo de la creación del mundo en seis días? . . . ¡ líquido! ¿Lo de Adán y Eva? . . . ¡ líquido! también! Todo mentira y superstición.35

"Nacional" is a truly anti-clerical character, and he seems to express what the author felt when he was writing this novel.

"Nacional" expresses Blasco Ibáñez's hope for the future, a hope which is founded on the education of the masses:

"Nos farta instrucción y abusan de nosotros."36 At another time, he says: "Todos los defectos y corrupciones del mundo eran para él producto de la falta de instrucción."37

"Plumitas," the bandit who spends three hours talking with Sol and Gallardo at the latter's country home, reveals the fact that he would not be a bandit if this way of living were not forced upon him by the rich. He says: "Lo que él probe necesita es justicia, que le den lo suyo; y si no se lo dan, que se lo tome. Hay que ser lobo y mete miedo."38 This unfortunate criminal, constantly chased by officers

of the law, is not basically bad. He feels that he has been born too late and that the road to a good life is closed to the poor; so he kills and steals in order to eat. Though the poor like himself have nothing to fear from him, he is willing at any time to gain his rights forcibly from the rich.

Since the anti-clericalism in *Sangre y Arena* does not indicate the denial of God; since the long descriptions are minute, and some of them horrible, yet not as revolting and irrelevantly detailed as naturalistic descriptions; and since the human bestiality of this novel is brought out in emotional outlets rather than through the indulgence of carnal appetites, I should say that this book shows little influence of Zola's Naturalism. Blasco Ibáñez's work is more vigorously realistic than it is naturalistic.

The last of the novels of the second period is *Los Muertos Mandan*, the action of which takes place in the Balearic Islands. It concerns the problem arising from the struggle between Christianity and Judaism, and the theme of traditionalism's warring against progress. Treating the incompatibility of Gentiles and Jews, it tells the conflict which arises when Jaime Febre, a middle-class young man who has spent lavishly the money left him by relatives, seeks to marry a wealthy Jewess so that he can build up his fortune. In the development of the theme of tradition versus progress, the novel describes the difficulty which
Jaime Febrer has in making the humble farmers of the island of Iviza treat him as though he is an individual on practically the same social level as they. It shows the troubles which Jaime experiences before he can adapt himself to a simple life, and before he can grow accustomed to the traditions of the Ivizan peasants. The treatment of the story is powerful, and the style shows itself to be less influenced by Zola's Naturalism than any other novel of Blasco Ibáñez's first two periods of writing.

The theme of the novel has a fatalistic trend, presenting the thought that men are born in a groove of society from which they cannot hope to escape. The title, Los Muertos Mandan, portrays the idea that people are "sometidos a la tiranía del medio, . . . repitiéndose a través de los siglos, como si fuesen siempre el mismo ser."39 Our ancestors, who established themselves on a certain level of society, are forever hovering about us, preventing us from breaking away from the prejudices, the scruples, and the pride that we have inherited from them.

¿Y por qué habían de mandar los muertos? . . . ¿Por qué obscurecían el ambiente con las partículas de su alma, semejantes a un polvo de huesos, que se posaban en el cerebro de los vivos imponiéndoles viejas ideas?40

This idea of the inability of society to break the bonds


40 Ibid., p. 244.
with which preceding generations hold it fast, is a fatalistic idea which Blasco Ibáñez copied from Emile Zola.

The simple folk of Iviza, in *Los Muertos Mandan*, feel animal attraction rather than romantic love. Young courters go armed with pistols and knives in order to realize their intention to visit their preferred sweethearts. Very often, they fight each other with guns to decide who is to win the girl's love. Fifteen or twenty suitors express to the father their wishes to court, and he lets them come on the same nights, each one being allowed a certain amount of time to impress the girl. When a suitor leaves, he discharges his gun; if the family disapproves of him, his shot is answered with more pistol shots, accompanied by clubs and rocks which are thrown at him.

The story of this novel is based on racial prejudice. Pablo Valls, a very understanding Jew, expresses his idea of the place which Jews hold in modern society. Because they can save and lend money, they are treated with a little more respect by the Gentiles than they would be if they had no help to offer. "En esto de las herencias no hay razas ni credos. El dinero no conoce religión."41 Jaime's aunt, Juana, whose entire enthusiasm is for God and religion, says that if Jaime marries Catalina, the Jewess, he will belong to a lower class; she will not admit any blood kin to her

41 Ibid., p. 92.
nephew if he marries into the Jewish race. This shows Blasco Ibáñez's view of the narrowness of church opinion and the selfishness of the Gentiles who accept financial help from the Jews and yet treat them as inferior beings. Pablo Valls said:

Indudablemente, detrás de los mallorquines nobles y plebeyos venían en orden de consideración los cerdos, los perros, los asnos, los gatos, las ratas . . . y a la cola de todas estas bestias del Señor, el odiado vecino de «la calle», el chueta, paria de la isla.  

Through all the novels that have been discussed in this study, the author has mentioned his disagreement with the church ideal that man should live humbly and sacrificially on this earth so that he may have the best that is to come hereafter. In this novel, he writes of the injustices of death, from which people cannot escape no matter what refuge they seek. And, feeling that man should live a full and happy life now, without taking a chance on the happiness of an after-life, he says:

¡Al diablo la muerte y sus miedos! ¿Iba un hombre honrado a pasar la existencia entera temblando por su llegada? . . . Podía presentarse cuando lo tuviese a bien. ¡Mientras tanto, a vivir!  

This is a summing-up of Blasco Ibáñez's philosophy and life. Although Jaime Febrer is afraid at first that he must remain outside the warmth of the Ivizan folk's hearts and

\[\text{Ibid., p. 89.}\]  
\[\text{Ibid., p. 199.}\]
homes, he finally decides to defy the commands of the dead and become respected on equal terms with these unassuming people. His opinion of life, after this decision, is changed completely:

La vida era hermosa. . . . El hombre podía moverse libremente, lo mismo que el pájaro y el insecto, en el seno de la Naturaleza. Para todos había sitio. ¿Por qué inmovilizarse bajo las ataduras que otros crearon, disponiendo del porvenir de los hombres que debían venir detrás de ellos? 44

Jaime's thoughts at the end of the book are more optimistic than in any other novels that have been discussed: "¡Malditos muertos! La humanidad no sería feliz y libre mientras no acabase con ellos." 45

Matemos a los muertos: pisoteemos los obstáculos inútiles, las cosas viejas que obstruyen y complican nuestro camino. Todos vivimos con arreglo a lo que dijo Moisés, a lo que dijo Buda, Jesús, Mahoma y otros pastores de hombres, cuando lo natural y lo lógico sería vivir con arreglo a lo que pensamos nosotros mismos. . . . No; los muertos no mandan: quien manda es la vida, y sobre la vida, el amor." 46

The slight shade of fatalism in this novel may result from the influence of Zola on the author. The descriptions, however, are charming and colorful rather than revolting; the characters are attractive ones taken from a simple, primitive society rather than from the sordidness and ugliness of the lowest class; and the optimism at the end of the story shatters the possibility of the existence of

46 Ibid., p. 353.
any other Zolaesque elements. In La Maja Desnuda, Sangre y Arena, and Los Muertos Mandan, Blasco Ibáñez seems to write in a manner that goes very far from imitating Zola. Realism is his natural manner of writing, and he steps over the boundary line between realistic and naturalistic expression only on the few occasions when the elements of Naturalism fit in with his thinking.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

In the development of the preceding chapters, it has been shown that, although Blasco Ibáñez used Emile Zola's naturalistic works for a model in his first novels, this naturalistic influence vacillated intermittently throughout the first two periods of his writing. Let us recall the elements of Naturalism present in his novels, the cases in which he broke away from Zola's method, and the various similarities and differences of the two writers.

Although Blasco Ibáñez copied to a certain extent Zola's emphasis on mirrored descriptions of reality, he usually avoided the tedious, monotonous detail which was found too frequently in the French author's works.¹ Zola's "scientific" observation and detail filled his novels with ugly descriptions which were at times obscene, but seldom did Blasco Ibáñez slip into using this brutal Zolaesque realism. Even though he did often overdo his details, and though he sometimes put all sorts of irrelevant and encyclopedic material into his novels, he tried to choose what was salient so that his descriptions might be graphic. His language is much less revolting, and his descriptions

¹Julio Cejador y Frauca, op. cit., p. 471.
have far more charm than do those of Zola. The fact that he did originally use Zola as a model, and that there are many similarities in their descriptive work, does not alter the fact that there is a great underlying difference in their manner of description. The difference is especially noticeable in the last three novels of the second series; for there is beauty in these that is rarely found in Zola's work, a beauty which indicates a softness and tenderness of character which Zola did not possess or, at least, did not reveal. There is more freshness and vigor in the works of the Spanish author.

Blasco Ibáñez seemingly was inspired by Zola in his revolutionary spirit and in his desire for progress. Both men detested the old traditions and prejudices which caused the continuation of inequality in the social organism. They wished to portray society in its worst form, and to preach a new revolutionary gospel to humanity, in the hope that some day capitalistic oppression might cease. Although their political views are somewhat the same, there is a difference in their final urge for democracy and reformation. Zola moralized openly in his novels with a social thesis, while Blasco Ibáñez, as a rule, merely placed the unfortunate things he saw before us, presenting them so clearly that

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3 Walter Starkie, "Blasco Ibáñez," Nineteenth Century, CIII (1928), 553.
we cannot possibly overlook the underlying meaning. Because of Blasco Ibáñez's energetic nature, he was easily influenced by the propagandist tendencies in Zola's writings. In his first series of novels, it is clear that he was making social attacks along with the descriptions of Valencia; and, in his second series, he comes forth as a true social propagandist.

Pessimism is an important feature of Naturalism, and both authors have this characteristic, although their pessimism lies in different fields and exists to a different degree of intensity. Emile Zola felt that there was no solution for the problems of mankind, for he thought that the forces of heredity and of the innate baseness of human beings were past all help. To him, men were beasts who were handicapped by hereditary weaknesses, and human endeavor against the evils of society was futile because the social ills needing attention were on a much higher moral level than were the human animals who were subject to the desires of their bodies. Blasco Ibáñez was less morbid in his study of man's animalism. He did not think that the physiological urges govern the psychological side of man's nature entirely; he was optimistic enough to feel that man's will sometimes triumphs over his physiological being. Although Zola assumed that no force, not even a general effort of humanity, could destroy the

4 Katherine Reding, "Blasco Ibáñez and Zola," Hispania, VI (1923), 369.
degrading, oppressing features of civilization, Blasco Ibáñez believed that social conditions would yield under an organized effort made by the masses. It was to this effort that he wished to stir the people, and it was for this ulterior purpose that he put his hope for the future in mass education. Because he was a Republican and a liberal, he thought that the majority of people could obtain their rightful power and choose their existence. The elements of pessimism, fatalism, and animalism are less intense and more varying in Blasco Ibáñez than in Zola, and for that reason the Spanish novelist's writings are consistently more hopeful than are those by the French author.

Both writers subordinated the development of plot to description and to the handling of the milieu. Zola began this portrayal of the life and activity of huge crowds moving about on a broad, realistic background, and he influenced Blasco Ibáñez in this respect. Blasco Ibáñez created individuals who were representatives of a class or a race; his characters, then, represent the masses and the crowds with which Zola dealt in such a masterful way. Several times the Spanish author pictured the people, gathered together by a common purpose in noisy, tumultuous groups, just as

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7 *Bell, op. cit.*, p. 94.
Zola had done.

Because of Emile Zola's trust in science, and because of his belief in the mechanistic, natural order of events in the world, his naturalistic theory denied the existence of a Supreme Being. He thought, pessimistically, that if there were a God, He would have set all the social evils right and would have brought the lower classes out of their misery; since the world was in such a bad condition, that was proof of the non-existence of a benevolent keeper of humanity. Blasco Ibáñez, who was a Catholic, never came to agree with the French writer in this respect. He believed in God, and he was opposed only to the falseness and evils of church organization. He thought that if the selfishness of religious practices were taken away, those practices which encouraged inequality and ignorance, the world would right itself and humanity would once more be happy and prosperous.

No matter what similarities there are in the finished products of the two writers, their technique of writing is entirely different. Zola, working in accordance with his theory of scientific procedure, made notes of his observation and registered each little detail when he wrote his novels. He studiously analyzed everything that he saw, and, after laboring over each projected novel, he would plod slowly to the end of an encyclopedic work, over every line of which he
had pondered carefully. Blasco Ibáñez, however, observed his subject-matter less closely; and, when the time came when his mind was full enough of material for a novel, he would write impulsively, finishing a piece of work with much speed. For this reason, his writing, in contrast with Zola's methodical work, pays no attention to language or style. It is careless, unpolished, rough, and often grammatically incorrect; it is unusually full of energy and excitement. Thus, there is more life running through the novels of Blasco Ibáñez than in the coldly-analytical novels of Emile Zola.

Because of the similarities between the novels of Zola and Blasco Ibáñez, it has been said by many that the latter received most of his inspiration from Zola's Naturalism. Close examination of the Spanish writer's novels, however, reveals that the naturalistic influence is not as great as it has been supposed. Blasco Ibáñez himself said that he was affected at first by the naturalistic theory, but that this influence appeared only in his first novels. After he was more mature and had developed his own personality in writing, he gradually shook off the naturalistic tendency and formed a style of his own. However, he retained certain

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8 César Barja, Libros y Autores Modernos, Siglos XVIII y XIX, Brattleboro, Vt., Vermont Printing Co., 1933, p. 400.
9 Warren, op. cit., p. 182.
10 Ibid., p. 181.
11 Cejador y Frauca, op. cit., p. 472.
characteristics of Zola, in lighter form, even through the last of his second period of writing. After he had received and absorbed the Zolaesque suggestions, he reproduced them once more as they were modified by his own personality and experiences, making them thoroughly Spanish. Any discussion of Blasco Ibáñez's literary inspiration would be inadequate without the mention of the tremendous influence exercised on him by Spanish literature. Pereda and Pardo Bazán were already successful in the genre of the realistic, regional novel, and the vigorous realism of Pérez Galdós also had its effect on the literary atmosphere of Spain. These nineteenth-century writers had obtained their realistic ideas from the tradition of the Celestina and the picaresque novels; so Blasco Ibáñez was influenced by realistic tendencies in Spanish literature which had originated several centuries before.

Blasco Ibáñez, therefore, because of his normally-Spanish fondness for Realism, easily found features of the naturalistic atmosphere about him which fitted into his scheme of writing. Needing a model to help him get started in the literary world, he looked to Zola for ideas. In the process, unfortunately, he gathered suggestions of Zola's excessive Realism which appear often in his first-period novels. The second-period novels, however, gradually out-

13 Reding, op. cit., p. 370.
grow the need for the spectacular elements of the French Naturalist's method. As soon as the young Spanish novelist had smoothed over the weaknesses of his own literary skill, using the older French writer as a model to do so, he abandoned Naturalism except in cases in which naturalistic ideas coincided with his own and made them stronger.

Thus, he did not imitate Zola to a large degree except in several of his first novels, which were written before his literary skill was mature enough to stand alone. The reason that naturalistic tendencies appear in his second group of novels, is that he occasionally stepped just a little over the boundary line between vigorous Realism and Naturalism, choosing points of the naturalistic method to make his Realism more expressive. He did not believe wholeheartedly, by any means, in the naturalistic theory; and his later novels, because of their being less severe and less intense than Zola's works, show a decisive development away from the hardness and cruelty of the French school. Except for his being the most nearly naturalistic of the Spanish authors, Blasco Ibáñez could not be said to belong to the school of literature represented by Emile Zola; much less would it be appropriate to call him the "Spanish Zola." "The influence of the Naturalistic school was corrected, in Ibáñez, by the force of regionalism." 14

14Bell, op. cit., p. 96.
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