

Making a Career of the Arrière-garde: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez as World Author

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To Darío Villanueva

In this essay I take a closer look at the international dimension of the arrière-garde. I will deal exclusively with the issue of whether being arrière-garde may play a significant role in the international canonization of a writer. My case study is based on Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867–1928), a Spanish writer with a world – that is to say, an international – literary career who nevertheless has been excluded from the Spanish national canon precisely because of being ‘arrière-gardiste’. Blasco Ibáñez’s world literary career and his exclusion from the national canon are assessed from a generational viewpoint. Because of the limitations inherent to the generation method, though, I will also explore a prosopographical approach by investigating a field shared by a collective biography of writers. Notwithstanding the provisional nature of the data, the approach may contribute to a better understanding of both the arrière-garde as an international phenomenon and world literary careers.

Introduction

In spite of the recent interest aroused by the phenomenon of ‘arrière-garde’ in French scholarship, whether actually termed as such (William Marx) or more vaguely labelled ‘antimoderne’,¹ it is a subject not unknown to other critical traditions. In 1986, John Adkins Richardson² dealt with the arrière-garde in art criticism as one of the forms – the avant-garde being the other – that opposition to convention may assume, where he identified convention with a modernism born from an ‘upper-middle class [... which] would hold the view that the discovery of new conditions of feeling and imaginativeness by isolated geniuses is

historically progressive' (Ref. 2, p. 120). And in 1999, Charles Altieri³ analysed then recent American experimental poetry as an outcome of the avant-garde tradition, which 'emphasizes exemplary forces that promise change for culture if it can align with how the artistic performance manages to break significantly from established decorums, now including the decorums of modernist experiment' (Ref. 3, p. 631). To this, Altieri added that 'where there is an avant-garde, there must be an *arrière-garde*' (Ref. 3, p. 633). The link between Modernism and the *arrière-garde* is not peculiar of Anglo-American criticism either. The collective book edited by Marx in 2004⁴ includes a section entitled 'Les Paradoxes du Modernisme européen' (The Paradoxes of European Modernism), a movement that Vincent Kaufmann characterizes in an earlier section as 'rather vague and whose definition changes significantly from one culture to another' (Ref. 4, p. 24).⁵

If the close link between the *arrière-garde* and Modernism provides good grounds for the comparison of the French and English critical traditions, when one takes into consideration the uneven international geography of Modernism underlined by Kaufmann⁶ and its consequences for the *arrière-garde*, whose international character has not been studied, the exercise becomes more challenging. If Spain and Spanish-speaking areas are included in this map of Modernism/*arrière-garde*, the difficulties increase dramatically as a result of the discrepancies in critical traditions (now, the Latin American, Spanish, Catalan, and English ones), the aforementioned uneven geography, and a conflicting chronology between Spanish and European Modernisms on the one hand, and between Modernisms in Spanish and Catalan and non-Modernisms in Galician and Basque on the other hand.

Although my wider aim is to investigate the international dimension of the *arrière-garde*, here I will concentrate on Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867–1928), a Spanish writer with an international literary career who has yet been excluded from the national canon precisely for being 'arrière-gardiste'. Instead of approaching the *arrière-garde* as merely a negative avant-garde, I understand by 'arrière-garde' both a corpus of works and its underlying poetics that have been erased from inter/national literary history as a result of its being anachronistic in relation to an established norm. This approach may help us to go beyond the simplistic generalization of avant-garde as novel and *arrière-garde* as conservative, and therefore is a crucial aspect when dealing with Modernism as a return to tradition or a lost classicism, as discussed by T. S. Eliot. It will help us, for instance, in assessing the contrast between Blasco Ibáñez's world literary career and his exclusion from the national canon as resulting from the debate over the so-called *problema de España* (Spain's problem). In this debate, Blasco Ibáñez found himself in opposition to the so-called 'Generation of 1898', which acted as the collective spokesperson for the Spanish national crisis around the turn of the 20th century. Because the generational method also has severe limitations, though, I will

seek to understand the special nature of Blasco Ibáñez's world literary career not only against the background of the fights over the definition of a national literary norm but also against that of the field shared by a collective biography of writers. To do so I will draw upon prosopography, a field inspired by the theories of Pierre Bourdieu, but with an empirical basis, as carried out in the research project 'Literary Generations and Social Authority', directed by Anders Olsson, Rolf Lundén, Bo G. Ekelund, and Mattias Bolkéus Blom in Sweden.

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez: The *arrière-garde* as (capitalist) art

'One may think', Henri Peyre states with regard to European literature, 'that after the stagnant years of 1846–56; a period of almost complete emptiness; the creative vigour has suddenly displayed great enthusiasm and increased the number of talented people' (Ref. 7, p. 149). This increase is represented by the *génération double* (double generation) of 1860–62/1867–72, to which Shaw, Conrad, Wilde, Yeats, Gide, Kipling, Proust, Valéry, Péguy, Mann, Rilke, Svevo, Pirandello, and Blasco Ibáñez, among others, belong (Ref. 7, pp. 150–154).

Peyre's statement is remarkable for two reasons. First, Peyre argues that generations are an international phenomenon. This transversal dimension of artistic resemblances implies that the traditional localism of the generation method is being qualified. Although Peyre does not completely succeed in rejecting the appeal of nationality – which is his second criterion for forming groups – his aim is always not 'to limit to a single country, the project of setting up groups' (Ref. 7, p. 104). Second, Peyre includes Blasco Ibáñez as a member of the generation of 1860–62/1867–72 along with other Spanish writers such as Unamuno, Ganivet, Valle-Inclán, Rubén Darío, Antonio and Manuel Machado, Martínez Ruiz 'Azorín' and Pío Baroja (Ref. 7, pp. 153–154), even though the main spokesman of the national variant of this generation, the so-called 'Generation of 1898,' Azorín, had not included him in his famous article 'La Generación de 1898'.⁸ For Azorín, the writers of what he calls *literatura regeneradora* (revitalizing literature) 'are Valle-Inclán, Unamuno, Benavente, Baroja, Bueno, Maeztu, Rubén Darío' (Ref. 8, p. 251). It is obvious that Azorín did not need to include his own name in this list. There is no trace, though, of Blasco Ibáñez. Still, it has to be said that Camilo Bargiela, whom Azorín elsewhere considers to be one of the most representative members of 1898 (Ref. 9, p. 142), in 1900 does list Blasco Ibáñez as one of the 'modernistas':

I am acquainted with all of them. Their names come to my mind to proclaim again the modernists' (*modernistas*) superiority to the old-fashioned people (*anticuados*), who still pirouette in disapproving journals and boudoir magazines.

[...] And next to Benavente one may name the following: Valle-Inclán, [...] Pío Baroja, [...] Rueda, Ricardo Gil and Eduardo Marquina, [...] Blasco Ibáñez,

Alejandro Sawa; novelists with a taste for tragedy when representing reality; Palomero, [...] Lerrooux, [...] Navarro Ledesma, Altamira, Carretero, Fuente, Contreras, [...] Dicenta and Manuel Paso, [...] Bonafoux, Luna, Rovira, [...] Costa, Maeztu, Alonso y Orera, Martínez Ruiz (Ref. 10, pp. 98–99)

The list goes on, and this passage clearly shows that Bargiela's outlook is broader than Azorín's but also that he applies different criteria. The use of the term *modernistas* (modernists) is most important in this regard, referring to 'independent spirits open to any scientific and artistic trend' (Ref. 10, p. 89). In any case, Azorín's generation list achieved greater prominence, and thus Blasco Ibáñez was completely excluded from the generation of 1898 in both literary criticism (the example of Guillermo Díaz-Plaja¹¹ in *Modernismo frente a Noventa y Ocho* is the most representative) and literary history. There are even literary histories that mention Blasco Ibáñez with the sole purpose of suggesting how sensible it would be to strike his name from (Spanish) literary history (Ref. 12, vol. 1, p. 130).

Contrary to Peyre's international canonization, Torrente Ballester's argument advances a completely different assessment in so far as his negative short chapter on Blasco Ibáñez is included in a section entitled 'La incitación del Modernismo. La respuesta a Europa' (Modernism's Incitement. The Answer to Europe). For Torrente Ballester, the problem posed by Blasco Ibáñez is a perennial anachronism because he practises an already obsolete poetics (Naturalism) that for the leading members of 1898 lacks any literariness.

There are many more examples of Blasco Ibáñez's rejection by the key representatives of 1898, and it is not necessary to go into complete detail. What needs to be underlined is that this rejection goes well beyond thematic or stylistic issues. What is at stake is an understanding of the writer's vital attitude, defined as that of the intellectual. Carlos Blanco Aguinaga (Ref. 13, p. 177) is the critic who has best summed up the vital divergence between the writers of 1898 and Blasco Ibáñez in the opposing traits of sobriety versus buoyancy, privation versus wealth, quietism versus adventure, localism versus internationalism, etc.

The fact that Blanco Aguinaga aims at detaching the received image of the generation of 1898 from the rebelliousness these writers showed in their youth reminds us that we should approach the aforementioned oppositions with caution. The same thing can be said when Modernism is detached from an opposition to the generation of 1898. This leads us to see, as Darío Villanueva¹⁴ has conclusively proved, another Modernism.

Undeniably, the differences between Blasco Ibáñez and the 1898 writers are enormous. Whereas the works of the generation of 1898 circulated only locally and in limited numbers, Blasco Ibáñez's novels enjoyed an international and large-scale circulation, as can be derived from information on the number of editions, the number of copies and the number of pirate copies of his works.

Rather than a Spanish-speaking ‘select’ audience, Blasco Ibáñez captivated a mass audience beyond Spain and Latin America in translation. *Flor de mayo*, published in 1895, was translated into French in 1904, into Portuguese in 1909, into English in 1921, into Czech in 1927 and into Italian in 1927. *La barraca*, published in 1898, was translated into Portuguese in 1903, into Polish in 1905, into Dutch in 1906, into English in 1917 and into French in 1923. *Sangre y arena*, published in 1908, was translated into Portuguese in 1909, into German in 1910, into English in 1911, into French and Swedish in 1923, into Polish in 1925 and into Italian in 1926.¹⁵ Rather than seeing, as a result of the lost war with the US in 1898, in the Americans ‘the enemy’, Blasco Ibáñez built himself a world literary career in which Hollywood played a key role. The English translation of his 1916 novel *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis*, by Charlotte Brewster Jordan, sold 100,000 copies in just a few days, half a million within six months, and two million by the end of 1924 (Ref. 16, p. 112). The success of the novel meant that Blasco Ibáñez was offered 200,000 dollars for the film adaptation (Ref. 16, p. 117). Directed by Rex Ingram and starring Rudolph Valentino (Julio Desnoyers), Pomeroy Cannon (Madariaga), and Alice Terry (Marguerite), this Metro production premiered in 1921 in New York. It was the top overall film of the year, beating Charles Chaplin’s *The Kid*. As a result of all this, the following words attributed to Blasco Ibáñez, despite being quoted by ‘El Caballero Audaz’ (pseudonym of José María Carretero Novillo) in an anti-Blascoist libellous article, neither seem unlikely nor far from the truth: ‘I earn more than Rudyard Kipling ... I am the most famous writer in the world’ (Ref. 17, p. 40).

If these editorial and financial data are important to grasp Blasco Ibáñez’s success in the literary market, they still do not show us how he captured the market. Nor are the opinions of the key 1898 writers about his vulgarity and his unsophisticated style and his pomposity helpful. These opinions tell us that their norms were not his (national and international) audience’s norms. The fact that criticism on the generation of 1898 has paid attention to the members’ opinions on Blasco Ibáñez, and not vice versa, is thus most significant. Blasco Ibáñez’s opinions would have supplied a different view on the group, whose stagnant image has also been discredited by Blanco Aguinaga.

From Blasco Ibáñez’s criticism of the 1898 writers one can implicitly distil two distinctive traits of his own work. First, Blasco Ibáñez refuses the programme, the literary manifesto. Second, when he does succeed in overcoming his distaste for the manifesto, his attention goes to what is happening in the international literary space, and not in the more restricted national one (the *Ensayos literarios* are a good example of this). Perhaps the only exception is his ‘Carta a Julio Cejador y Frauca’ (Letter to ...), dated March 6, 1918, which was included by the addressee in the ninth volume of his *Historia de la lengua y literatura*

castellana (History of the Castilian Language and Literature), published that same year.¹⁸ Although Blasco Ibáñez insists on his anti-programmaticism, a trait that Puchner relates to the general condition of the *arrière-garde* (Ref. 19, p. 183), the ‘Carta’ is an assessment of his literary career and, therefore, of his underlying poetics. Both the insistence on Cejador y Frauca as knowing, that is as actually having read, Blasco Ibáñez’s work, as opposed to those that condemned him without having read him, and the explicit rejection of those that embrace the literary manifesto are a clear reference to the generation of 1898 (Ref. 20, p. 473). Contrary to the 1898 writers, whom he now professes to detest, Blasco Ibáñez calls himself ‘a writer and as little a man of letters (*literato*) as possible’ (Ref. 18, p. 475). He, that is to say, passes himself off as the anti-intellectual of the 1898 group.

Although it is difficult to say how sincere Blasco Ibáñez was, and if he really did not mind being rejected by the 1898 writers, what cannot be denied is that the ‘Carta’¹⁸ argues a ‘literary trajectory’, i.e. an evolution that shows how unfair the criticism is that has been levelled at him. The four stages that Blasco Ibáñez in 1919 distinguished in his own production, and which he chose to see as only provisional because ‘I still want to live longer and, if so, I will most probably do different things’ (Ref. 18, p. 476), are the following:

1. 1894–1902: from *Arroz y tartana* to *Cañas y barro*.
2. 1903–1906 [1909]: from *La catedral* to *La bodega*.
3. 1914: *Los argonautas*.
4. 1916–[1919]: from *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis*.

However, Blasco Ibáñez’s contemporaries restricted his production to both the Valencian cycle – which was either despised because of its outdated Naturalism or admired for its local colour – and the international cycle, which was despised because of its ‘mass style’. The latter are the words of ‘El Caballero Audaz’, for whom Blasco Ibáñez had become ‘the ‘Ford’ [mass producer] of Spanish literature’ (p. 18).

In fact, Blasco Ibáñez’s literary trajectory is more complicated than this. In the ‘Carta’ the Valencian cycle is divided between, on the one hand, *Arroz y tartana* (1894), his ‘only Zolaesque’ novel (Ref. 18, p. 476), and, on the other hand, *La barraca* (1898), *Entre naranjos* (1900) and *Cañas y barro* (1902), which Blasco Ibáñez claimed were written under the influence of ‘Victor Hugo, with his poetic novels’ (Ref. 18, p. 476). During the same period, however, Blasco Ibáñez also ventured into other genres, such as what he called the *novela arqueológica*, with *Sónnica la cortesana* (1901), based on the model of Henryk Sienkiewicz’s hugely successful *Quo vadis*. It is with this historical novel that Blasco Ibáñez experiences how different the national and the international audience may be: ‘Literature’s caprices! *Sónnica*, of all my novels is the one that was less read in

Spain, according to the print run. While in translation it has been a huge success in Germany and the US' (p. 476).

Blasco Ibáñez states that the novels of his second phase, partially constituted by *La catedral* (1903), *El intruso* (1904), *La bodega* and *La horda* (1905), have a strong social meaning. These are precisely the novels that the 1898 writers never mention (with the exception of Baroja, who denounces *La horda* as plagiarizing some of his works²¹). This is certainly significant when one stops to think that the explicit aim of Blasco Ibáñez with this cycle was to participate in what gave coherence to the generation of 1898 and what may be named, with Julius Petersen's²² term, the 'generational experience': the *problema de España*. Blasco Ibáñez expresses this problem in the following terms: 'We have just experienced our colonial catastrophe. Spain's situation was disgraceful, and I fought fiercely, visualizing some examples of our country's inactive life, because I thought that might be helpful' (Ref. 18, p. 476). Things become even more complex when we find that Blasco Ibáñez within this second phase also includes three more novels, *La maja desnuda* (1906), *Sangre y arena* (1908), and *Los muertos mandan* (1909) that already foreshadow his fourth phase.

The third phase includes just one novel: *Los argonautas* (1914), the first of a cycle that remained unfinished because of the outbreak of the First World War and that was intended as a 'series of novels on the American people who speak and think in Spanish' (Ref. 18, pp. 476–477). When he writes the 'Carta' Blasco Ibáñez is in his fourth phase, with novels such as *Los cuatro jinetes del Apocalipsis* (1916), commissioned by the French president Raymond Poincaré, and *Mare Nostrum* (1917). For the writer, his different styles are due to the changes of vital milieu. His fourth phase, for instance, he sees as resulting from his experiences in 'international worlds, the world of those who are happy, idle, in search of pleasure in the finest places of the world' (Ref. 18, p. 477).

Blasco Ibáñez's literary career, as assessed by himself in 1919, has nothing to do with the image created of him by the 1898 group and as later promoted by literary history, both of them insisting on his outdated naturalism. 'In my first novels,' the author says, 'I was very much influenced by Zola and the naturalistic school; *only in my first novels*. Afterwards my true personality developed' (Ref. 18, p. 472). While his contemporaries persevere in identifying him as the 'Spanish Zola' (Ref. 18, p. 472), Blasco Ibáñez himself discerns four experimental stages in his career in which he tested out several appurtenances (regional, historical, social, and cosmopolitan) that reached a large audience, both national and international. Although Blasco Ibáñez's viewpoint is no less self-interested than that of the 1898 writers, it does help us to better understand his success with works that in his own words, 'touch people very deeply and provide some hours of fulfilment' (Ref. 18, p. 473).

A novelist around the world: Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and the 1887 cohort of fiction debut writers

The limitations of the generation method are well-known. In general, Hans Jaeger's²³ arguments on these limitations are still valid, especially those referring to the practice of literary history. Even if these limitations may be somehow overcome, the generation is but a group of writers as seen *a posteriori*, a group that shares some interests, which may be summarized as a 'literary norm'. This norm elucidates their work and at the same time shows their distance from those other writers who are not admitted to their ranks. Sometimes the fight is much more a way to achieve social recognition than the search for an authentic school.

As stated in the previous section, Blasco Ibáñez's rejection by the 1898 writers for being 'arrière-gardiste' is much more telling about the group's norm than about that of the Valencian writer, and it certainly does not tell us anything about his inter/national success. To explain the difference between Blasco Ibáñez's national and international reception in terms of the difference between a 'select' (suitable for the intellectual) and a mass (suitable for the mass writer) audience, as does 'El Caballero Audaz', is very simplistic, if not downright tendentious. Blasco Ibáñez's own explanation of his success in the 'Carta' provides us with relevant data to understand the progression of his career.

In lectures from the period, and in *La maja desnuda*, his *roman d'artiste* of 1906, Blasco Ibáñez developed a number of arguments that complement the 'Carta' from a point of view that I will call 'pre-generational'. In the stage before the formation of a generation the writer is plunged into a field of forces in which he has to take up a position. This position influences the writer's further career, but not in a deterministic way, as other circumstances, e.g. other agents of the literary institution, may shape its direction.

Blasco Ibáñez is acutely aware of this situation. In 'Emilio Zola', the sixth in a series of lectures he gave in Buenos Aires, he refers to the *tiburones* (sharks), i.e. the beginning writers who 'without a ship of their own, toss about restlessly.' Blasco Ibáñez defines two main roles for them in relation to the acclaimed writers: 'they threaten us and at the same time put pressure on us' (Ref. 24, p. 81). *La maja desnuda* clearly illustrates this viewpoint on artistic trajectories. The main character, the painter Mariano Renovalles (the author's alter ego), in his earlier stages does not have a distinctive style. His work is but a mixture of several masters' styles. Renovalles wins applause due to this mixture; a situation the narrator considers a *magnificent debut* (Ref. 25, p. 211). In 'La novela moderna', the eighth Buenos Aires lecture, Blasco Ibáñez tells us who his national masters were during his period as a 'shark': 'Benito Pérez Galdós, José María de Pereda, Alarcón, Juan Valera, Pardo Bazán' (Ref. 26, p. 120). Among the international masters he recalls Zola, whom in the 'Carta' he reproaches for

the excesses common in the school leader ('jefe de escuela', Ref. 18, p. 472). Maybe this explains why Blasco Ibáñez attaches central importance to Victor Hugo. Once he has developed a mature style, which in the case of Renouales is related to the innovation of 'those modern painters who so deeply moved him',²⁷ the artist is considered to be a master and thus the younger artists start to threaten him/her. This is the moment of the institutional recognition, which canonizes a work imitated and, at the same time, castigated by the young artists. The outcome of this trajectory is a success, both national and international that, in the case of Renouales, has the US as a main scenario. It is the audience, therefore, that has the ultimate say. The audience may make an interpretation unforeseen by the writer: 'if the audience makes a dozen interpretations, who knows if the one that succeeds is better than the writer's...!' (Ref. 18, pp. 473–474); or, one might say, as regards Blasco Ibáñez's works, 'better than the critics'.

Prosopography, defined by Donald Broady as 'a kind of collective biography [...] based on a comprehensive collection of data' the aim of which 'is not the individuals per se but rather the history and structure of the field' (Ref. 28, pp. 381–382), may provide us with a tool to analyse what I have called the 'pre-generational' situation. According to Rolf Lundén,²⁹ Bo G. Ekelund, and Mattias Bolkéus Blom, this method aims at establishing a cohort defined by the entry of writers into the literary field. This entry is signalled by the publication of a book-length work of prose fiction. In the case of Blasco Ibáñez, his prose fiction debut took place in 1887 when he published *Fantasías (Leyendas y tradiciones)*, with all the thematic, formal, and stylistic choices this implies.³⁰ Some of the works not mentioned in the 'Carta' were even published in the same years as others that he does include, such as *Viva la República! Novela histórica* (1893–1894) and *Los fanáticos* (1895).

For the data of the 1887 cohort of fiction debut writers, I draw on the information provided by the ninth volume of the *Historia* by Cejador y Frauca²⁰ because, and surprisingly so, it is organized according to debut years. The data provided by Cejador y Frauca are combined with those provided by Ferreras in his *Catálogo de novelas y novelistas españoles del siglo XIX*,³¹ which proves that the former are highly reliable. None of the key representatives of the generation of 1898 is part of the literary field into which Blasco Ibáñez made his entrance in 1887. Of his cohort fellows, Blasco Ibáñez has the longest publishing trajectory (43 years). In spite of the provisional nature of the data, the number of writers who make their entrance in 1887 and do not have any later works or that do not have works post-dating their debut with more than five years is remarkable. Probably their careers were a failure. Only Blasco Ibáñez managed to make literature his profession, that is, he was a *literato*, but obviously not in the sense he himself rejected in the 'Carta'. None of the other writers that made their debut in 1887 enjoyed a publishing and circulation success comparable to that of

Blasco Ibáñez's. Only a history of literary production, such as that of Cejador y Frauca,²⁰ records their names, which otherwise have vanished from Spanish literary history.

Blasco Ibáñez is the only writer considered, as he puts it, a 'shark' within the 1887 cohort.³² Of the masters mentioned in his lecture 'La novela moderna', the publishing trajectories of Alarcón, Pereda, Valera, Pardo Bazán, and Galdós reach respectively to 1882, 1896, 1903, 1920, and 1921, covering all the four phases in Blasco Ibáñez's account. During what Blasco Ibáñez himself designates as the first stage of his literary career in the 'Carta' (1894–1902), these masters still continued to produce naturalist and *costumbrista* (local customs) works, with the exception of Galdós, who introduced some changes (Ref. 13, p. 179). The 1898 writers insisted that they differed from these masters. And in spite of the 1898 writers' determination to present Blasco Ibáñez as an *arrière-garde* writer, the time-span and the success of his publishing trajectory prove that his choices were, in his own way, different from both those of the 'masters' and the '1898 writers'.

From his 'feuilleton' and regional novel debuts to the cosmopolitan one, Blasco Ibáñez succeeded in achieving a position within the 'federal republic of letters' ('república federalista de las letras', Ref. 33, p. x). His national contemporaries could not aspire to such an international literary career, while his international contemporaries had to get used to sharing the literary field with him. In this regard, Anatole France's comment on meeting Blasco Ibáñez in Buenos Aires is most telling: 'Rivalry. Another lecturer has arrived in Buenos Aires: Blasco Ibáñez. He checkmated me at the very beginning. Many feverish people wait for him at the station, and take him to his hotel triumphantly' (Ref. 34, p. 238).

Concluding remarks

Over the years, the aesthetic-ideological clash between the generation of 1898 and Modernism has undergone a radical reassessment. Villanueva has argued that it only makes sense to speak of the 1898 group if it is understood 'as the manifestation in Spain of an international crisis whose sense depends on the issue of modernity' (Ref. 14, p. 32). In addition, Luis Iglesias Feijoo claimed that 'only if [the 1898 writers] are seen within the context wherein they evolved, they may start to speak with a voice of their own: that of the pioneers of Modernism in Spain' (Ref. 35, p. 43). This reassessment has led to a plural vision of Modernism.

This new line of argument, which challenges among other received ideas that of the generation of 1898 being the *arrière-garde* of international Modernism, has only been applied to some key representatives of the 1898 group, namely Valle-Inclán and Baroja. However, what happens when hitherto excluded writers are appraised within this new scenario from a generational viewpoint? Blasco Ibáñez is a case in point. Excluded from the generation of 1898 by its proposers,

Blasco Ibáñez was also excluded from the *generación modernista*.¹¹ In each case, the exclusion has been argued on the grounds of his work being arrièrè-garde, relying upon an outdated naturalist poetics against which the different modernisms mount a fight. One should be surprised, then, at the inconsistency between the only Spanish writer who pursued an international literary career during the modernist period and his exclusion even from the new international dimension of Spanish Modernism, which does not even state that his arrièrè-garde is an international phenomenon.

While the generational method stated that Blasco Ibáñez's arrièrè-garde is related to the 1898 group's literary norm and should therefore be excluded from literary history, the pre-generation method provides us with a completely different prospect. First, it shows us that Blasco Ibáñez's choices have nothing to do with the 1898 group because these writers did not form part of the literary field into which the former made his entrance. Second, it supplies us with relevant information on Blasco Ibáñez's choices in relation to both his cohort colleagues and the masters who still captured the market. Third, it poses questions about the success of an international literary career by a writer excluded from the national canon.

The author does not have detailed answers to these questions yet. This is a preliminary report on ongoing research to test the relation between arrièrè-garde and world literary career. In the case of Blasco Ibáñez, further empirical data on the 1887 cohort of debut writers are necessary, especially as regards the international constitution of cohorts. Otherwise, neither Blasco Ibáñez's large international audience, nor the world status of his literary career as acknowledged by international criticism, can be explained. As for the latter factor, one may recall that in 1923 S.P.B. Mais included Blasco Ibáñez (as the only Spanish writer in his study) in a list of the most important international 'modern' writers, comprising Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, Stella Benson, Somerset Maugham, and John Galsworthy.³⁶ For Mais, Blasco Ibáñez's success is due to an arrièrè-garde that, this time, is linked to a movie style: 'Ibáñez represents a new order of writer. [...] Ibáñez is called into being by the demand for a crude story, brimful of action, which lends itself to dramatisation on the cinema screen. *The Four Horsemen*, judged by any standard, is a completely ridiculous story' (Ref. 36, p. 89). But it was on this style precisely that Blasco Ibáñez had relied for building a world literary career: 'Until now several adaptations of my novels have been made. At present, I am writing novels especially for the cinema. Cinema pervades the world, but no one yet is a world cinema novelist. The position is vacant. I will make an effort that a Spaniard occupies this position. One may be greeted with applause every night all over the world, beyond racial and language borders' (Ref. 37, pp. 160–161). As can be seen, the problems posed by a world literary career such as that of Blasco Ibáñez, are not minor ones.

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21. Baroja thinks Blasco Ibáñez has plagiarized his trilogy *La lucha por la vida* in *La horda*. Baroja insists on this plagiarism several times in his memoirs: ‘Blasco Ibáñez’s *La horda*, based on a false idea, is a kind of imitation of some books of mine’ – see P. Baroja (2006) *Desde la última vuelta del camino* (Barcelona: Tusquets) vol. 3, p. 242. However, Baroja does not say that *La horda* forms part of a tetralogy begun in 1903 with *La catedral*, one year before Baroja’s *La busca*, the first part of his own trilogy, was published, nor does he mention Blasco Ibáñez’s debts to Zola’s unfinished cycle *Les Quatre Évangiles*.
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27. ‘Aquellos pintores modernos que tan profundamente le impresionaban’ – see V. Blasco Ibáñez (1998) *La maja desnuda*. Ed. Facundo Tomás (Madrid: Cátedra), p. 243.
28. D. Broady (2002) French prosopography: definition and suggested readings. *Poetics*, **30**(5–6), pp. 381–385.
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30. Locating Blasco Ibáñez’s debut in 1887 may seem surprising, as the writer himself had opted for 1894, with *Arroz y tartana* as the beginning of his literary career. His works from the period 1887–94 are not mentioned in the ‘Carta’, due, according to Juan Ignacio Ferreras (1972) *La novela por entregas 1840–1900. (Concentración obrera y economía editorial)* (Madrid: Taurus), p. 232, n129, to editorial factors. Blasco Ibáñez had lost his rights over these feuilletons because they had been sold to the publisher. That is why he preferred to draw the attention of his audience to works over which he did retain rights. Notwithstanding these economic factors, it is an undeniable fact that with the works of the period 1887–94, Blasco Ibáñez made his entrance into the literary field.
31. J. I. Ferreras (1979) *Catálogo de novelas y novelistas españoles del siglo XIX* (Madrid: Cátedra).

32. A proof of the importance Blasco Ibáñez had for the masters is given by Galdós when asked by José León Pagano about the most important young novelists: 'Blasco Ibáñez, Arturo Reyes, and especially Pío Baroja' – see P. Baroja (2006) *Desde la última vuelta del camino* (Barcelona: Tusquets) vol. 1, pp. 131–132. Baroja underlines the importance of *especially* when used by Galdós.
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