

# Vicente Blasco Ibáñez: anti-Semitism among orange trees

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## ABSTRACT

The dialogue of Blasco Ibáñez, sometimes radical, controversial, and strongly anti-clerical, was at certain moments also openly antisemitic. I analyse the basis of Blasco Ibáñez's Judeophobia by studying the evolution of his anti-Jewish prejudice before and after the Dreyfus affair, and his difficulty in overcoming its most classical and traditional dimensions.

**Keywords:** Blasco Ibáñez, Judeophobia, anti-Semitism, Dreyfus affair, blasquism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Vicente Blasco Ibáñez (1867–1928) is widely recognised as one of the most representative and influential politicians of turn-of-the-century republicanism, a vital moment of transition for the Spanish political left. A federal Republican, influenced by Pi y Margall and by the uprising of the Valencian Cantonal rebellion (Millán Sánchez, 2006, p. 34), from his youth he established himself as one of the most popular politicians in València and, like some of his contemporaries who had also begun to establish themselves in Europe, led an authentic mass movement.

The peculiar originality of *Blasquism* was precisely what situated it as a precursor to modernity, based on mass politics and the systematic use of rallies and demonstrations. Blasquism was an unusual political movement, which effectively combined an astonishing tactical capacity with radical, reforming, and strongly anti-clerical populism (Laguna, 1999,

p. 48). Vicente Blasco Ibáñez and Blasquism, with its broad urban social support based on the new industrial proletariat and traditional craftsman, led decades of left-wing political hegemony in València (Varela, 2015, p. 343).

Crucially, Blasco's political activity had an outlet in the editorial of his newspaper, *El Pueblo* [The People], which he directed between 1894 and 1905. His journalism has been defined as aggressive, polemicist, and mobilising (Laguna, 1999, p. 47), and *El Pueblo* played a role in it as a modern propaganda machine (León, 1986) for Blasco's desire for popular political conquest through sensationalism. His political program, although nebulous, was based on three main elements, united by the use and abuse of revolutionary proclamations: a visceral republicanism, anti-clericalism, and the desire for social justice and the elimination of all class differences (Mira, 2004, p. 36).

Some authors have pointed out that this anti-clericalism may have been a communicating vessel through which certain politicians on the Spanish left of the period, among them Blasco, moved towards forms of Judeophobic prejudice, in a mimetic process also occurring in several neighbouring countries (Álvarez, 2012, p. 108). In my opinion, anti-Semitism is clearly manifested in certain periods of Valencian political and literary work, varying in intensity over time, and its anti-religious core intermingled with components of the economic anti-Semitism common in the European socialism of the time.

Analysing the evolution of this process, we will study the extent and phenomenology of Blasco's Judeophobia, and how the former was reconciled with specific left-wing political ideologies, without apparent contradiction. We will start from the hypothesis widely established by historiography that the anti-Semitism of prominent figures of the European left of the time reached a turning point with the political furore of the Dreyfus affair. To analyse the way in which Blasco dealt with the Jewish question and the representation of all things Jewish, I located and worked with texts in which he made references to 'the Hebrew people'. In line with Blasco's different creative stages, these texts take the form of multiple and diverse formats including journalistic articles, literary production, correspondence, and political speeches. In addition, I have also included a review of how his different biographers have treated this specific phenomenology. I organised this present work into three chronological sections, beginning first by analysing the structure that reproduced Blasco's anti-Semitic thought prior to the Dreyfus affair; next, we will specifically study the impact that the breaking of this scandal had on his thinking; finally, I end by surveying his subsequent Judeophobia and the difficulties he had in overcoming his prejudice.

### THE STRUCTURE OF BLASCO IBÁÑEZ'S ANTI-SEMITISM

Very few biographers have echoed the anti-Semitism present in Blasco Ibáñez's ideology and political discourse. Those who have are, essentially, historians of Spanish anti-Semitism who have chosen to highlight this aspect of his work (Álvarez, 2002, Rehrmann, 2003).

The few Blasco scholars who have done so, generally consider the Valencian writer's Judeophobia a youthful sin (Smith, 1978, p. 161) which he overcame when the Dreyfus affair broke the news in France in 1898, in a self-imposed process of disavowal of prejudice like that experienced by so many French socialists of the time.

We must understand that anti-Semitism has never been a monopoly of the political right, nor has its rejection by the left been a timeless categorical imperative (Brustein and Roberts, 2015; Marcus, 2015; Winock, 2014). European historiography has extensively documented how politicians representing progressivism, such as Fourier, Proudhon, Toussanel, Auguste Chirac, and Malon, manifested a complex form of Judeophobia in the 19th century (Dreyfus, 2011, p. 22–32 and 43–68; Erner, 2005, p. 219; Lazare and Espina, 1986, p. 158), with antecedents in a certain erudite left-wing anti-Judaism with anti-religious origins (Winock, 2014, p. 185). Throughout the entire 19th century, perhaps except for the Simonians, both utopian and scientific French socialist movements alike were deeply stained with anti-Semitism (Poliakov, 1968, p. 377–391).

In Spain, the anti-clericalism of the period, translated into the defence of an active secularism, very often adopted intentionally populist stances, directing the masses towards combat against an anti-liberal and reactionary opposing force (Suarez, 2012). In my opinion, this may have been one of the main grounds upon which Blasco was drawn towards anti-Semitism: Álvarez Chillida rightly identified how there are multiple parallels with the iconography and stereotyped semantics of classical anti-Semitism in the conformation of the Spanish anti-clericalism and anti-Jesuitism of the period (Álvarez, 2012, p. 108). According to Rozenberg (2010), and based on studies by Carlos Serrano (1987), the radical populism of Blasquist discourse attributes the nation's difficulties to an omnipresent enemy hidden in the shadows which, by its nature, is foreign to its people, be it because of their Jewish or Jesuit status.

Judeophobia is a prejudice that, although it reformulates itself over time, replicates certain common elements, which one could term a basic structure of

anti-Semitism (Balboa and Herzog, 2016). This structure reproduces elements related to the semantics of power: a strong power (compatible with only a few, highly influential people), personal powers (imaging people rather than social processes behind the world's destinies), conspiring powers—or distortion of the roles of aggressors and victims. If the power is enormous, any act of aggression against it automatically becomes an act of self-defence. According to Holz and Salzborn, the exaggeration of the evil represented by the Jews, that is, the demonisation of their actions, forms a discourse according to which, the use of every means of defence by the imagined victims seems justified against this absolute evil (*apud* Herzog, 2014).

Blasco's anti-Semitism was not just a form of racism. Although racist prejudices are expounded in his work (Láinez, 2012, p. 48), these do not form an elaborate discourse; rather, they are uncoordinated and appear sporadically, and were present at a time when racial theories were especially popular<sup>1</sup>. The case is different for his Judeophobia which, as we will see, far beyond being merely rhetorical, he recurrently referred to, made thorough arguments for, and which he maintained over time.

As we go deeper into the main components of Valencian anti-Jewish prejudice, a topic I have divided into sections, this will become clearer. I have used four conceptual [apocalyptic] riders: Jewish essentialism, the power of the Hebrews, the classic Judeophobic prejudice of the Christian tradition, and finally, their threatening and imminent danger. As Claussen pointed out, modern anti-Semitism is much more than a partial or occasional prejudice: rather, it is a specific form of worldview (Lainez, 2012), a way of explaining

reality that, as a semantic authority, helps its owner to understand the world in which they live. In the same way, these are four horses that Blasco would never completely renounce in his work or his lifetime.

#### *First rider: the essential nature of Jews*

The first element that shapes anti-Semitic prejudice is its fundamental determinism: the never-ending characterisation of Jews as members of a stateless and wandering people, eternally resistant to assimilation. The assignment of a common essential nature or character and morality to Jews, progressively separated from shared religious beliefs and came to focus on their *spirit*, an essentialism in *the blood* of the Jewish people that would determine and explain their culture and civilisation (Bravo, 2012, p. 103).

Reproducing this process, Blasco is often amazed by the resilience of the Jewish race, "*el absorbente poderío de ese pueblo que no tiene patria*" [the absorbing power of this people who have no homeland], "*que no forma sociedad*" [who do not form a society] (Blasco Ibáñez, September 7, 1897), a people that, to Westerners, are completely foreign and "*que vive como acampado sobre el suelo de Europa*" [who live as if camped out on Europe's soil] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

Blasco's Jew knows no other loyalty than to their own race, "*un pueblo que solo adora lo que favorece a su egoísmo*" [a people who only adore what favours their selfishness] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896), unaware of any feeling of belonging to any of the nations in which they live. Hebrews are described as "*acampados sobre el mundo*" [camped out over the world], eager to monopolise the riches of the nations they visit, "*engordando como parásitos, olvidados de la ciudad santa cantada por Salomón y fieles siempre a Jehová*" [getting fat like parasites, forgotten by the holy city of Solomon's {Song of Songs} and faithful to Jehovah always] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

The speculative character is innate to the Jewish race. Their propensity for profiteering and insatiable thirst for monopolising other people's wealth is directly linked to their parasitic nature:

<sup>1</sup> "*Los pueblos degradados no necesitan de la libertad y no la conquistan; las razas no contaminadas de impurezas, fuertes y nobles, necesitan del derecho como del aire y como de la luz y como de la nutrición*" [Degraded peoples do not need freedom and do not conquer it; the races not contaminated by impurities, strong and noble, need laws as they do the air, the light, nutrition]. (Blasco Ibáñez, 8 February 1895). Also see his articles related to Spanish colonial policy in North Africa. (Blasco Ibáñez, 1979, p. 27, 34, 40, 48, 120, 122, and 126).

[The Jewish people disgust me by their greed, by their hidden hostility to all who are not of their race, [...] nineteen centuries of persecution and punishment cannot create worthy and free men, but rather, abject beings, with the smile of a slave on their face and the ferocity of a hyena in their heart] (Blasco Ibáñez, 7 September 1897).

### *Second rider: Jewish power*

We also find the recurrent idea of world domination by the Hebrews, through the shadowy management of the springs of economic and political power, to put Western nations at their service. In this sense, Blasco Ibáñez is categorical: “*los judíos son hoy los reyes del mundo*” [today the Jews are the kings of the world], owners “*de la suerte y la fortuna de las naciones*” [of the fate and fortune of nations], a people that does not hesitate to treat “*a los soberanos de igual a igual y vuelca o ensalza las instituciones políticas con solo abrir o cerrar las compuertas de la Bolsa*” [sovereign {nations} on an equal footing or to overturn or exalt political institutions by simply opening or closing the floodgates of the Stock Exchange] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896). Powerful Jews, descendants of “*los parias de la Edad Media*” [pariahs of the Middle Ages] are now “*los que ostentan títulos nobiliarios*” [those who hold noble titles], the powers that “*en ciertas repúblicas cambian a su antojo los ministerios, metiendo en ellos a sus altos empleados*” [in certain republics, change the administrations at will, substituting in their {own} senior employees], and are ultimately, “*los árbitros de Europa*” [Europe’s arbitrators] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

For Blasco, all the worlds’ states, from great powers to small republics, had become the modern servants of this new world power that was parasitising nations “*como sanguijuelas ávidas*” [like avid leeches] (Blasco Ibáñez, 4 January 1895). Blasco believed that as a consequence of the vicious cycle of debt and borrowing, soon “*llegará el día en que toda España será propiedad de los judíos que manejan millones en Londres y París*” [the day will come when all of Spain will be owned by the Jews who manage millions in London and Paris] (Blasco Ibáñez, 4 January 1895).

In Blasco Ibáñez’s Manichean ideology, the characteristics of capitalism and finance encouraged their use in an impervious and cohesive group of “*poder anónimo*” [anonymous power]; “*feudalismo moderno*” [modern feudalism], “*cuya personalidad permanece oculta y en el misterio*” [whose personality remains hidden and a mystery], “*la omnipresente masonería del dinero*” [the omnipresent freemasonry of money] and “*la avaricia capitalista, del negocio duro y sin entrañas*” [capitalist greed and uncompromising business lacking conscience].

The way Blasco’s imaginary so often worked with the idea of personal powers added to the visualisation of this great power. As a good anti-Semite, for the Valencian, it was people, not social processes that were behind the destinies of the world. Hidden behind capitalism, stock market speculation, and wars, anti-Semitism supposes that specific individuals consciously act like puppeteers to direct the world’s fate. Blasco often specifically personified [these characters] in the Rothschilds, the influential family of bankers “*siempre tras la cortina, con la astucia propia de su raza*” [always behind the curtain, with the cunning characteristics of their race]. He says that they are the “*dueños [...] de la fortuna y el porvenir de España*” [owners of the fortune and the future of Spain] where they “*mueven como un maniquí a nuestros ministros de Hacienda, y con solo un gesto de desagrado ponen en conmoción a todo el Gabinete*” [move our finance ministers like puppets, and with only a {slight} gesture of displeasure, they put the whole Cabinet into commotion] (Blasco Ibáñez, 16 August 1896). For him, the governments of Cánovas and Sagasta were always in need of loans that came from the shameful “*de las cajas de los Rothschild, Pereire, Camondo y toda la pillería judía*” [vaults of the Rothschilds, Pereires, Camondos, and all the Jewish scoundrels] (Blasco Ibáñez, 29 August 1896).

### *Third rider: classical anti-Judaism*

Neither did Blasco stop perpetuating the more traditional components of anti-Semitic prejudice, such as the notion of the deicidal character of the Jewish race or the physical stereotypes of Jews, which had been polished and crystallised over centuries of literature and popular imagery. These elements connected him with

the most classic Christian religious anti-Judaism, as if his anti-Semitism needed the legitimacy derived from its centennial origin. When he speaks of the politicians of the Restoration who bleed the nation at the “*costa de consentir la rapacidad de la avaricia hebrea*” [cost of acquiescing to the rapacity of Jewish greed] (Blasco Ibáñez, 31 August 1896), Jews do so “*embolsándose las cuantiosas propinas*” [pocketing the large tips] that, Blasco highlights, come straight from the hands of “*los que asesinaron a Jesús*” [those who murdered Jesus] (Blasco Ibáñez, 31 August 1896).

Despite the silence of the national clergy, Blasco wanted to scandalise the fact that Cuban soldiers had not received any pay because of the state of Spanish public finances, even though “*veían al Gobierno en tratos con la maldita raza judía, con los descendientes de aquellos que mataron a Jesús, y persistían en su sagrado mutismo*” [they saw the Government in dealings with the damned Jewish race, with the descendants of those that killed Jesus, and persisted in his sacred silence] (Blasco Ibáñez, 17 November 1896):

[A people cursed for many centuries, for having killed a god, their punishment has consisted in pocketing the money of all those who vilify them. [...] the blood, not of the sweet victim, but that of the Christian peoples, still drips upon them today in the form of a golden shower of rain that the deicides calmly put into their arks] (Blasco Ibáñez, 16 August 1896).

The same Jew who today is adorned with

[the banker's dress-coat and the humble and deceptive Jewish smile [...] before, it was the filthy and emaciated Jew with a white-bearded chin, wearing a dreary houppelande and a {money} bag on his belt, and housed in a garret in the winding medieval alleys, like a miser in the dark rooms, guarding his two treasures, his beautiful daughter and an ark full of gold and jewels] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

To Blasco, the image of a dark alleyway was a propitious one which he used to symbolise these opaque Jewish machinations, and he would often implement it to

frame the deal-making of Hebrews endowed with the most classic stereotypical traits:

[The Jewish people, which in Europe symbolise avarice, profiteering, a desire to exploit, unfriendly greed; [...] disgusting and sordid Jews who lodge in the Roman ghettos or in the gloomy alleys of Dutch cities (Blasco Ibáñez, 7 September 1897).

#### *Fourth rider: the Jewish danger*

Blasco is amazed by the Jewish race's capacity for resistance and their untamed will to win power to dominate the nations of the world: “*aprovechándose de las ideas modernas de tolerancia y mutuo respeto, es dueña del dinero del mundo*” [taking advantage of modern ideas of tolerance and mutual respect, they own the world's money] (Blasco Ibáñez, 7 September 1897).

In perfect knowledge of the violence and persecution suffered by the Jewish people throughout history, he reserves no room for sympathy. If the Jewish people are admirable, they are only so “*por su rapacidad, su constancia y su avaricia, [algo que] no obliga a que el resto del mundo permanezca inactivo dejándose saquea*” [because of their voraciousness, perseverance, and greed, {something that} does not oblige the rest of the world to remain inactive, allowing themselves to be plundered] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

Blasco was concerned about people's apparent idleness when threatened by the predatory Jewish race's systematic plundering. This is not an observation cast at random, a trivial anti-Semitic lament, but rather, it was typical of Blasquist ideology, which involved a call to action. Blasco, explicitly aware of the intellectual evolution of the world in which he lived, attributed the past persecutions and violent medieval butchery to religion. As he himself writes, “*En siglos pasados*” [in centuries past], “*era el fanatismo católico el que se enseñaba en el pueblo deicida, degollándolo en las juderías y en los ghettos o empujándolo a las hogueras de la Inquisición*” [it was Catholic fanaticism that attacked the deicide people, slaughtering them in the Jewish quarters and in the ghettos or pushing them into the bonfires of the Inquisition] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15

August 1896). However, {for him}, moving past the history this phase of religious intolerance, does not seem to indicate the arrival of peace for the Jewish people but rather, vindicates, with joy, the updated reasons—shared by most modern European nations—for their persecution:

[In cultured Germany, the people mutiny, wanting to exterminate the Jews; in a capital as important as Vienna, in their anti-Semitic furore the citizens stand before the government. Paris, the capital of civilisation, raves for Drumont and Rochefort's writing against the bands of financial crows coming from the sands of Palestine, and all over the world a movement of aggressiveness that could be translated as an instinct of self-defence, is notable against these monarchs of gold, against this insatiable bloodsucking race] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

He continues by stating that the 'anti-Semitic furore' that spread across the continent was based on the absolutely legitimate reasons of the 'self-defence' of nations bled by this parasitic race, and the reaction must be immediate, or it will be too late:

[Tomorrow, if a destructive outburst does not occur across Europe against that feudalism of money, that monstrous octopus [...], those who have no homeland, those who have never been able to recover the city that was their cradle, will be the owners of Europe; and as for Spain, we will have to install a sign that says: "Game reserve of the Rothschild brothers. No hunting without the owner's permission" at the highest point of the Pyrenees] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

The call to legitimately exterminate the Jewish race was not disorganised, it was not a mere literary *boutade* with which to invigorate the discourse or the text. It was the culmination of the elements of anti-Semitism we have already mentioned, such as the threatening [Jewish] power or inversion of the role of aggressor and victim. To Blasco, it was [the Jews] and their plots, their unbearable domination, that justified the violent reaction of an already assaulted and mercilessly exploited people. The accumulation of Hebrew power to

the benefit of their dark designs and thirst for Jewish revenge, enlivened by the memory of past persecutions, were elements that [should] instil fear in all those subjected to their empire.

Their dominion is an imminent danger whose response should not be delayed because its real and tangible effects are already notable, he says. The Jews in the shadows "*esclavizan y absorben la industria; los que hacen imposible la emancipación y dignificación del trabajo*" [enslave and absorb industry; making the freedom and dignity of work impossible]; a brief order suffices to cause "*pánicos artificiales en la Bolsa*" [artificial stock-market panic]. Those "*en España tienen a sueldo a Cánovas y Sagasta como criados obedientes*" [in Spain who have paid Cánovas and Sagasta like obedient servants] taking advantage of the situation of weakness and "*desdichas nacionales para robarnos y anularnos lentamente*" [national misfortunes to steal from and slowly nullify us] (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896).

The use of the 'parasitic nature of Jews' motif, as well as identifying them with financial and unproductive powers, runs through Blasco's work as a justification for anti-Semitic violence. In another article, Jews and capitalists are indistinctly characterised as "*masa chupóptera*" [a bloodsucking mass] that combined, "*esquilman el país*" [overexploit the country]. Here, Blasco does not hesitate to call [citizens] to action, continuing his game of images by claiming that "*oficien los españoles de Doctor Sangredo, propinando una sangría copiosa, en competencia con las sanguijuelas nunca ahítas que consumen la nación. La sangre pide sangre*" [Spaniards behave like 'Doctor Blood', copiously bleeding {the Jews}, in competition with these never-sated leeches which consume the nation. Blood demands blood] (Blasco Ibáñez, 17 January 1895).

For Blasco "*el próximo siglo va a ser para la humanidad de terrible combate*" [the next century will be a terrible combat for humanity], a fight in which the human race—which obviously excludes the Jews—"*no tiene fuerzas para un estallido revolucionario*" [will have no strength for a revolutionary crisis] and, in the terms

already suggested, is bound inevitably to slavery (Blasco Ibáñez, 15 August 1896). In fact, [for him], if we should fail in this [fight], the only remaining dilemma would be which master the slave would choose, in short, “*o con los judíos, o con los jesuitas*” [whether to go with the Jews, or with the Jesuits]. When Nakens’ newspaper *El Motín* [The Rebellion] reproduced this article by Blasco, he did so by stating the above in a way that, seen in today’s light, is at the very least, very disturbing: “*Ni con los unos ni con los otros: con la Ciencia, que habrá facilitado más medios de acabar con todos*” [Neither with one nor the other: with Science, which will have facilitated {us with} more means to end them all] (Álvarez, 2002, p. 212).

### THE DREYFUS AFFAIR OR THE ZOLA CASE?

According to most historians, Blasco Ibáñez’s anti-Semitism, which we have analysed so far by following him through several articles published in his newspaper between 1895 and 1896, dramatically ended when the Dreyfus affair broke in 1898. The anti-Semitism of a large part of the European left, mainly the French, suffered a definite setback after the crisis of the French artillery captain’s judicial-process scandal (Dreyfus, 2011). But more specifically, Blasco was much more impacted by the *Zola case*, than by the case of the French captain which [Zola] was bringing forward (Álvarez, 2002, p. 212). Blasco felt for Zola “*la veneración de un discípulo*” [the veneration of a disciple] (Varela, 2015, p. 355), and his relationship with him was one of true devotion. Perhaps this explains why Blasco waited until January 1898, when the French writer published his famous ‘*J’accuse...!*’ [I accuse...!], to initiate any kind of revision of his anti-Semitism.

In fact, in 1897, the year before the publication of ‘*J’accuse...!*’, when Zola had already begun his campaign for a review of the case based on evidence showing that it had been a Judeophobic and reactionary farce, and when Dreyfus had already been rotting as a prisoner on the *Île. du Diable* (Devil’s Island) for three years, Blasco’s anti-Semitism continued to enjoy unbeatable health.

We can verify this in some chronicles written by the Valencian in that same year, when he visited the Santa María la Blanca synagogue in Toledo (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, p. 1,144 and p. 1,157), where his prejudice seems not only intact, but he also deepens its eliminationist aspect. Reflecting, in front of the façade of one of the main synagogues in Sefarad, the architecture of the building evokes the character “*de la raza proscripta y perseguida, del pueblo deicida maldecido por el cristianismo*” [of the proscribed and persecuted race, of the deicide people cursed by Christianity]:

[It is a flattened hut, which seems to sink into the ground so as to draw less attention; a miserable building [...] with all the sordid aspect of the Jewish moneylender who went through the streets in the Middle Ages, dirty and ragged, who lived in a little house with a pigsty entrance, but who covered the inside of the home with rich jewels, surrounding himself with oriental luxury, and giving his wife the gifts of a prince].

For Blasco, the Jewish race was predestined [to be money] speculators, was lacking in sensitivity, and were a people of businessmen “*refractario al arte*” [refractory to art]. This may be why he praises, with delectation, the figure of Vicente Ferrer, who had instigated the massacre of Jews in Toledo in 1391. He vindicates the Dominican friar, stating that, without a doubt, “*haber nacido en esta época [...] más de una vez lo habríamos hecho del comité y aplaudido en los meetings; [...] un producto legítimo del pueblo valenciano, siempre revolucionario*” [if he had been born now [...] more than once we would have included him in the committee and {we} would have applauded {him} in the meetings; [...] a legitimate product of the Valencian people, always revolutionary]. This Judeophobic–revolutionary hybrid configuration connects with the Blasquist Manichaeism attitude towards social structure, the conflict between the disinherited and powerful, between the honest manual workers and the speculators of capital:

[The killing of the Jews of Toledo was a beautiful solace for the poor against their exploiters; of the lousy who worked and died of hunger so that the clever Hebrew would take advantage of his idiocy and his misery].

Also, in that same year, 1897, when he comments on the celebration of the First Zionist Congress of Basel in 1897, he does so in a revealingly sceptical way, considering it a romantic adventure condemned to failure precisely because of the intrinsic nature of its race:

[If a Jewish nationality were constituted, life would be impossible, since everyone is used to exploiting without mercy, to unscrupulous business, they would steal from each other and would end up not being able to live together].

In any case, he says, it would not be “*fácil que abandonen esta Europa [...] que les engorda*” [easy for them to abandon this Europe [...] that fattens them] (Blasco Ibáñez, 7 September 1897).

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#### THE TURN OF THE CENTURY FOR AN ANTI-SEMITE

In any case, it is abundantly clear that when the Zola’s case broke, it directly impacted Blasco Ibáñez. Echoing the French novelist’s challenge, published on 13 January 1898, the whole of the Spanish liberal-press—notably, the Blasquist newspaper *El Pueblo* among them—reacted by denouncing the anti-Semitism of the reactionary sectors of the Gauls and of Drumont’s followers, whom Blasco had previously praised on many occasions. Compared to the newspaper directed by the Valencian, no other paper so vehemently reflected the climate of passion unleashed in Paris, nor with so much detail (León, 1970).

From 1898, Blasco did not hesitate to personally to draw attention to himself in the *Dreyfusard* campaigns promoted in the press and at rallies, collecting signatures in support of Zola, organising charity collections, and orchestrating the traditional effervescence on the street that characterised the Valencian. However, despite putting his best effort and habitual hyperbolic activity into this process, the weaknesses of his revision process to [adequately] eliminate prejudice would soon emerge with the passage of time.

There may be several reasons for this. First, he provided no conscious, systematic public reflection upon this change of attitude, rather, from a certain moment, his

discourse diametrically rotated, without explaining his reasons or thought processes to his attentive but baffled readers. He did not mention a single word about his previous diatribe. It is as if, considering anti-Semitism as the differentiating axis in Blasco’s political and literary work, we can distinguish a Blasco I and a Blasco II—not from the breaking of the Dreyfus affair, but rather, regarding the time before and after the Zola case. Second, he used a different format than the one he had used to launch his biggest tirades against the “*maldita raza judía*” [damned Jewish race], that is, his newspaper’s editorial section. Let us remember that Blasco stopped editing *El Pueblo* in 1905, and after this his journalistic activity also diminished—although without ever disappearing—in favour of his literary output. For all these reasons, the revision of his previous positions was dispersed and unsystematic, emerging through novels, travel chronicles, or personal correspondence, which were not usually published in the newspaper, and when they were, they were more like literary complements than authentic political opinion articles. Third, we will see how, despite his change in discourse, the underlying legacy [of his anti-Semitism] prevented Blasco from completely ridding himself of certain tics (such as using typical anti-Semitic structural motifs) which, almost unconsciously, he periodically returned to. Even though, after the Dreyfus affair, Blasco copiously expressed his public admiration for several Jews, he would never completely lose the traces of the anti-Semitism of his youth (Smith, 1978).

In my opinion, Blasco consciously renounced the explicit anti-Semitism of his political and propagandistic public face which, as we saw, was especially present in his articles prior to the Dreyfus affair. However, he was not as successful at overcoming the latent dimension of its Judeophobia, which he would continue to reproduce, perhaps unconsciously, in the form of prejudices, stereotypes, and symbolic automatisms. In the light of the above, from hereon in we are forced to re-examine Blasco’s other literary production formats: especially his novels, travel chronicles, and correspondence.

We find the first example when, with the proper precautions, we analyse his literary work from the period. Of course, a novelist’s creative license allows them to



put words and opinions into their character's mouths that they do not necessarily share themselves. But in Blasco's case, the discourse of his narrators and the language his protagonists use are often too familiar and is always revealing. In addition, let us not forget that Blasco articulated his literary work as a correlate of his political positions, making it a key precursor to Spanish social novels (Oleza, 1999). Therefore, his work, whose output was especially intense between 1898–1905, is impregnated with his political thought and ideas of social justice, progress, and anticlericalism.

One of his most famous novels, *La barraca* [The hut], was published as a serial in *El Pueblo* in 1898, after Zola published his famous '*J'accuse...!*' In it, he still often uses of the term 'Jew' as an epithet: when uncle Barret's family is evicted by Don Salvador, the multitudes crowd at his door "*prorrumpiendo a la sordina en maldiciones contra el judío don Salvador y aquellos tíos que se prestaban a obedecer a semejante perro*" [cutting into the silence with curses against the Jew Don Salvador and the uncles who allowed themselves to obey such a dog] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1958, p. 43). Later, when the protagonist's daughter, Batiste, is harassed and runs to her house bleeding, her mother screams with anguish when she sees her enter, explaining how "*aquellas gentes eran peores que judíos*" [those people were worse than Jews] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1958, p. 125).

Two years later, in 1900, in his novel *Entre naranjos* [Among orange trees], when portraying the passers-by in the Víctor Manuel Gallery in Milan, he refers to some of them as "*gente que pone en movimiento sus ahorros con esa tacañería italiana comparable únicamente a la codicia de los judíos*" [people who set their savings in motion with that Italian tight-fistedness comparable only to the greed of the Jews] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1919a, p. 149).

In the novel *Sónnica la Cortesana* (*Sonnica*), published in 1901, the protagonist hears the following reflection from her beloved's lips:

[It is Israel, an amalgam of miserable tribes camped in an arid country, around a temple of barbaric construction, copied in every town. They

are hypocrites, rapacious, and cruel; that's why they abominate love. If a people like this [...] were to dominate the world, imposing their beliefs, the eternal light that shines in the Parthenon would be extinguished; humanity would walk in the dark, with a dry heart and dead thoughts, the earth would be a necropolis] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1978, p. 94).

Even in 1904, in the novel *El intruso* (*The intruder*), the narrator reasons the following by observing two miserly shopkeepers:

[They were Basques, but Aresti saw in their hard eyes, in the mellowness with which they stole from their patrons, despising them, and in their miserable appearance, something that reminded him of the Jews. The people in the neighbourhood hated them. [...] Despite their insatiable greed, they had a look of misery and squalor sadder than that of people from outside] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1919b, p. 35).

This aspect of Blasco's work is especially significant when, in 1909, he published novels containing Jewish characters, *Luna Benamor* (about the Jews of Gibraltar) and *Los Muertos Mandan* (*The dead command*; about the Mallorcan *Xuetes*). As we will see, in them he preserves moral and physical traits, stereotypes, and themes that perpetuate old prejudices. The Jewish characters are rich and greedy and have a twisted intelligence which is always hidden behind a prominent nose. In *Luna Benamor*, for example, which deals with the impossible love between a beautiful Hebrew and a Gentile, the narrator reflects:

[And she [...] far from him [...] would be another Hebrew, an excellent mother of a family, fattened by home life, flaccid and crushed by the fertility of her race, with a swarm of children around her, worried at every hour about the family's earnings] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1924, p. 105).

In another part of the novel, a description of a Jewish relative of the novel's protagonist returns to other similar and familiar motifs:

[Zabulón was already old, but a vigorous blackness remained in him, [...] revealing a fanatical soul, of a hard faith like that of the old populace of Jerusalem, always ready to stone or crucify the new prophets] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1924. p. 35).

Although Blasco's tone is generally one of frank sympathy towards the *Xuetes* and Sephardic Gibraltarians and he demonstrates some knowledge of Hebrew traditions and customs, his characterisations are, at their least, ambivalent (Rozenberg, 2010, p. 96), when they not simply more "*una suerte de antropología turística*" [a sort of touristy anthropology] (Mainer 2001, from p. 384 onwards):

["We are everywhere", he said, winking wickedly. Now we will spread across America. Governments change, peoples fall apart in the long run, but we are always the same. Not for nothing we are expecting a Messiah. Someone will come] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1924, p. 44).

[Hebrew...? Lies. He walks very upright, treads strongly, and our people walk softly, with their legs bent, as if they're going to kneel] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1924, p. 70).

As Álvarez Chillida points out, the above proves the perfect compatibility between political philo-Semitism, on the one hand, and an anti-Jewish mentality, on the other (Álvarez, 2002, p. 213). This is evidenced in Blasco in the persistence with which the Jewish epithet survives in his work in the form of a moral rather than physical qualification. In his social novel *La horda* [The horde] from 1905, the protagonist, Maltrana, criticises his cousins' behaviour; antiques dealers by profession, he recognises that they "*eran unos judíos, como decía el padre, sin alegría, sin afectos, cual si tuviesen cegada el alma por el polvo amontonado en el establecimiento*" [were Jews, as the father had said, without joy, without affection, as if their souls were blinded by the dust piled up in the building] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1919c, p. 195).

In his famous novel *Sangre y arena* (*Blood and Sand*) from 1908, a character recalls how, when a moneylender tried to evict an old woman for not paying her rent,

they spoke with the venerable woman and gave her 100 duros [500 pesetas in coins] saying: "*Abuela, tome: págueme a ese judío, y lo que sobre pa usted y que de salud le sirva*" [Lady, here: pay that Jew, and what's left is for you and I hope it serves you well] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1919d, p. 206).

In *Los Argonauts* [The Argonauts], written as late as 1914, a character tells the protagonist the following: "*Mira, en vez de irte a América, de escribir versos y todas esas ambiciones de judío que te vienen de pronto por ganar dinero debías ser uno de éstos; albañil, por ejemplo*" [Look, instead of going to America to write verses, and all those Jewish ambitions you suddenly have because you're earning money, you should become {a professional}, for example, a mason] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1914, p. 21).

In the same novel when two characters talk about Admiral Columbus' supposed Jewish condition, one of them says to the protagonist: "*Aquel hombre extraordinario tenía todos los caracteres del antiguo hebreo: fervor religioso hasta el fanatismo; aficiones proféticas; facilidad de mezclar a Dios en los asuntos de dinero*" [That extraordinary man had all the characteristics of the ancient Hebrews: religious fervour to the point of fanaticism; prophetic interests; and he easily mixes God into matters of money] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1914, p. 102). To which the other, shortly after, stresses:

[There is something in him [...] of the fierce exaltation of the ancient Hebrews, who, whenever they established their nationality, were persecuted and beheaded over religious quarrels. In our history, the most fearsome inquisitors were of Jewish origin, and who knows if a large part of Spanish fanaticism is not due to the Hebrew blood that was ingested in the definitive formation of our people!... The Jew of those times did not ever lose sight of business in the midst of his mystical reveries, and he appreciated gold as something divine. Like Columbus] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1914, p. 103).

Setting aside the scope of Blasco's novels, his travel chronicles represent a second important group of texts. These documents have a more personal style to the

extent that they do not require the creative license of his fiction, and so in this respect we can be more critical. Similar contradictions can be observed in several chronicles written during 1904<sup>2</sup>.

In them Blasco Ibáñez pledges himself to promote the rejection of the “cruzada contra los israelitas” [crusade against the Israelites] of the “*desequilibrado Drumont y sus compañeros*” [unhinged Drumont and his companions], whom Blasco had so frequently referred to not only a couple of years prior. Blasco himself, who, as we have seen, made the word ‘Jew’ an insult which was interchangeable with that of ‘exploiter’, ‘leech’, ‘moneylender’, and ‘parasite’, now chides that “*en la misma España hay locos soeces que alardeando de ideas avanzadas lanzan contra el enemigo político el epíteto de judío como un argumento aplastante*” [in Spain itself there are foulmouthed madmen who, boasting advanced ideas, launch against the political enemy the epithet of ‘Jew’ as an overwhelming argument]. The conversion of Blasco II seems to be complete.

According to his new perspective on the Jewish question, “*los hebreos son hombres modernos, que han trabajado y trabajan por la civilización tanto o más que muchas naciones. Constituyen un gran pueblo, el pueblo tal vez más admirado y fuerte de la tierra*” [the Hebrews are modern men, who have worked and {still} work for civilisation as much as, or more than, many nations. They constitute a great people, perhaps the most admired and strongest people on earth] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972b).

Probably influenced by the philo-Sephardic [the Sephardi Jewish ethnic division which originated in the Iberian Peninsula] campaigns of senator Pulido we can, nevertheless, verify how this trend often turned out to be nothing more than a ‘fine patina’ under whose surface the same anti-Semitic substrate that had continued to spread throughout Europe could quickly be

distinguished. Several Spanish writers from the period oscillated between the most aggressive anti-Semitism and an ambivalent philo-Sephardism that remained anchored in the prejudice of differentiating the “*buenos sefardíes, buenos por ser de procedencia española, mientras se oponen con rudeza a los malos askenazíes*” [good Sephardic Jews, good because of their Spanish origin, while brusquely opposing the bad Ashkenazic Jews] (Rehrmann, 2003, p. 308).

In this exercise, Blasco falls when he thinks he glimpses qualitative differences between the different types of Jew, participating by stating how, “*dentro de la gran familia judía los más notables por su inteligencia fueron siempre los de origen español*” [within the great Jewish family, the most remarkable for their intelligence were always those of Spanish origin]. Before the elevated Sephardic Jews, zealous collectors of Greek philosophy and culture; given the Hispanic synagogues that “*producían un Maimónides*” [produced a Maimonides {Moses ben Maimon}], the rest of the “*hebreos esparcidos por el mundo no eran más que mercaderes y prestamistas de los barones feudales, enterrando su oro para desviar la atención del populacho*” [Hebrews scattered throughout the world were no more than merchants and lenders to the feudal barons, burying their gold to divert the attention of the populace].

We can soon see how Blasco, clearly unaware of this contradiction, continued to interweave comments which complement Jews with perpetuations of classic anti-Semitic stereotypes within the same texts. Here, for example, he again refers to the [idea of a] hidden Jewish world power:

[They belong to a race that silently owns almost all the world. They are camped out in all walks of life and protect and support the fraternity of a race chastened by many centuries of persecution] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, from p. 1096 onwards).

Or the one of Jewish solidarity [and theirs being a race] gifted with commercial abilities:

[Israeli solidarity extends from the high-booted Hebrews in dirty fur coats who swap old clothes in Warsaw or St. Petersburg, to the millionaires

2 Compiled by León Roca, and then reissued in a collection of Blasco's complete works: *Crónicas de viaje: Gibraltar, Los hebreos y La Sinagoga* [Travel chronicles: Gibraltar, Hebrews, and the Synagogue] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, from p. 1,096 onwards).

of Jewish origin who manage New York and Chicago's trust-funds] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, from p. 1096 onwards).

In another chronicle, in front of the Gibraltar synagogue façade (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972), Blasco falls back into in his incongruities, being clumsily swept along by his old tics. He says the ancient and fierce Mosaic faith has been pacified by replacing, on the altar, Yahweh with money, but its desire for domination remains intact:

[Even the Jews of the Messiah speak, in the synagogue, because of the traditional force of custom, but nobody expects it. What for? The Messiah arrived long ago. Not in flesh and blood, but in spirit: he is work, perseverance, and money, the three qualities of modern Hebrews; the triumphant Israel dominates the world without apparatus nor arrogance, secretly and meekly, but this does not lessen its power].

Classical Jewish stereotypes are scattered through Blasco Ibáñez's texts, unable to rid himself of traditional prejudice, even though he intended the opposite: "*los grandes banqueros judíos son prestamistas y amigos de los primeros reyes de la tierra*" [the great Jewish bankers were lenders and friends of the first kings of the earth], they were "*los descendientes de los que mataron al Hijo de Dios*" [the descendants of those who killed the Son of God], endowed with "*la influencia de esta aristocracia del dinero*" [the influence of this aristocracy of money], and "*su solidaridad de raza*" [their solidarity as a race]. When he describes the "*patriarca de los hebreos de Gibraltar*" [patriarch of the Gibraltar Hebrews] he does so by perpetuating figures anchored in tradition, like a venerable old man who wears "*la nariz grande y aguileña de los semitas*" [the great, aquiline nose of the Semites]. Nor does Blasco object to portraying Jewish women by slipping in similar stereotypes and common motifs: although [she] is "*dotada del espíritu del negocio lo mismo que el hombre y superándole en astucia y penetración*" [endowed with the same spirit of business as men and surpassing him in cunning and penetration], there is still "*queda otra fuerza a favor de la hebrea, un poder sugestivo y omnipotente: y es su belleza*" [another strength favouring Hebrew women, a suggestive and

omnipotent power: her beauty], something that he himself recognises as a topic of universal literature and dramaturgy (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972).

Blasco would never free himself from reproducing, among others, these stereotypes about the physiognomy, essentialism, or the greed of Hebrews. Even in 1918, when writing a biographical sketch about the French writer Maurice Barres (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, from p. 1576 onwards), and referring precisely to the rumours in France of the writer's Jewish origin, Blasco Ibáñez could resist talking about his profile as a "*judío rico levantino*" [rich Levantine Jew], of his "*ojos semitas*" [Semitic eyes], and of "*la nariz, la inconfundible nariz, tan enorme, audaz, ganchuda, semejante al pico de ciertas aves de pelea, y que ocupa gran parte de su rostro*" [the nose, the unmistakable nose, so huge, audacious, hooked, similar to the beak of certain fighting birds, and which occupies a large part of his face].

Commenting on a 1919 novel by Frappa, *Bajo la mirada de los dioses* [Under the gaze of the gods] (Blasco Ibáñez, 1972, from p. 1668 onwards), he points out that the novel's protagonist, who at a given moment must change his religion: "*como ha nacido con la vocación de negocio, como está destinado a ser un manipulador de dinero, se inclina por el judaísmo, y hace bien*" [as he was born with a vocation for business, as he is destined to be a manipulator of money, he inclines towards Judaism, and does well]. For Blasco, Judaism remains synonymous with money and financial power; a stateless and wandering race predestined to domination and speculation which, as for any religion, has its own selfishness:

[The demonic power of money has never been as great as in our time, and this power is going to concentrate, by the impulses of a mysterious whim, in the hands of those men born at the end of the Mediterranean, without a country, without true religion, and who, thus, choose the flag and the beliefs that best suit them].

Finally, moving from Blasco's literary and journalistic texts to his intimate writing, it is also revealing how he reproduced similar prejudices in his private sphere, as

his collaborator Gascó Contell, for example, transcribed a 1926 conversation he had had with the writer:

[Tomorrow you will accompany me to rue Racine (headquarters of the Ernest Flammarion publishing house, directed by the Hebrew brothers Max and Alex Fisher). I want to put those Jewish dogs on trial] (Gascó, 1957, p. 175).

Blasco also made similar comments about Calmann-Lévy, Blasco's main editor in France whom he also considered his friend, as can be seen in practically all the letters sent to third parties mentioning the Jewish editor (apud Laínez, 2012), letters that we can consult in the *Epistolario de Vicente Blasco Ibáñez–Francisco Sempere (1910–1917)* [Epistolary of Vicente Blasco Ibáñez–Francisco Sempere (1910–1917)].

## CONCLUSIONS

The case of Blasco Ibáñez illustrates not only the specific phenomenon of politically-articulated Judeophobia, but also the almost unaltered survival of the topics of popular Judeophobia as an effective vehicle for transmitting prejudice. In the first sense, like his left-wing contemporaries at end of 19th century, Blasco abundantly used the terminologies and codes of classical anti-Semitism to link Judaism to international capitalism, federation, and hidden power, without [noticing] any apparent ideological contradiction.

Here we have seen how, despite the honest review exercise the Valencian undertook a priori after the Zola case, prejudice can survive in the form of clichés and images strongly anchored in popular culture and perpetuated by language. Although Blasco renounced anti-Semitism as a political weapon, he was not as successful at losing the resources and symbolic codifications of these prejudices, with the use of the term 'Jewish' surviving in his work as a qualifying physical and moral epithet. We can even find the use, whether conscious or unconscious, of such stereotyped images in his work decades after the Zola case. As Reig pointed out, the way in which Blasquism based its hegemony on the "*asunción de la cultura popular*" [assumption of

popular culture], on the systematic use of the spontaneous and common language of the street, is significant; but it brought with it one of the great problems of this populist approach, "*la derivación de los residuos emocionales [...] hacia formas de exaltación irracional*" [the transfer of emotional excesses [...] towards forms of irrational exaltation] (Reig, 2000, p. 342).

For many authors, left-wing anti-Semitism suffered a definitive blow with the Dreyfus affair. However, we have seen, at least until 1898, anti-Semitism was considered to be consistent with progressive ideologies, and was also widely used as a versatile element rich in revolutionary and popular symbolism which Blasco did not hesitate to use.

In my opinion, in the case of Spanish anti-Semitism, the idea that genuine anti-Semitism is impossible in the absence of a strong and perceptible Jewish community, seems to bear too much weight; rather, world financial power, anti-imperialism, and simple populist imagery should instead be condemned. [In this argument,] there could be no anti-Semitism, basically because there were no Jews; Blasco himself seems to hide behind similar reasoning when he declared in *The Jewish Tribune* magazine in 1920:

There is no Jewish question, Spain is not Russia. [...] I might even say there are no Jews in Spain, consequently there is no Jewish problem. The traditional odium for the Jews does not exist. Do not make mountains out of molehills.<sup>3</sup>

However, we now know that anti-Semitism as a prejudice is completely independent of the real existence of Jews (Lendvai, 1971). The low visibility of the Hebrew community has never been a problem that prevented the development of 'anti-Semitism without Jews'. In the absence of the physical identification of its victims, the anti-Semitic imaginary is transmuted into the belief in all kinds of dark conspiracies, in which we find that Hebrews prevail precisely because of their lack of visi-

<sup>3</sup> From the article: 'Spain three quarters Jewish. Greatest literary figure in modern Spain depicts semitic influence on his country' (apud Rehrmann, 2003)

bility. Still anchored in the language and perpetuated by mass media and popular culture, it has been able to conform a peculiar dehumanised image of Jews, which lacks the contextualisation and confrontation that would make the Jewish community more visible.

When analysing the visibility of the Jewish community in Spain, we may find processes of social exclusion linked, precisely, to such discursive production. As Herzog points out, marginalised groups often encounter problems of representation in the public sphere (Herzog, 2017), because the processes of social invisibility or structural irrelevance of certain groups do not mean that those excluded as a topic are not relevant for the rest of the society, “*simplemente no aparecen como relevantes para la creación de su propia identidad pública, sino como meros objetos de la misma*” [they simply do not appear as relevant to the creation of their own public identity, but rather, as mere objects of it] (Herzog, 2009).

In my opinion, the specific weight of anti-Semitism on the Spanish left in general, and in Blasco Ibáñez in particular, should not be measured by its quantitative importance when it comes to the contamination of a given moment in the history of progressivism. It is noteworthy that in this present study prejudices and Judeophobic stereotypes have been identified in barely a score of political articles and a dozen novels by a hugely prolific author who produced more than a thousand of the former and almost fifty of the latter. Rather, it lies precisely in its qualitative capacity to embed itself in seemingly unpropitious environments, such as the left-wing, and there, to escape visibility. As Wahnón points out, anti-Jewish arguments are often very mobile, a sort of ‘wandering Judeophobia’: more than a discourse, we could speak of a discursive activity in which the incessant manufacture and recycling of Judeo-phobic signifiers is a structuring process, but is never definitively structured (Wahnón, 2005).

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