

Artemio Precioso Ugarte (1917–2007): An Avuncular Environmental Activist in Spain

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Artemio Precioso Ugarte, one of the founders of Greenpeace in Spain, was my uncle, and I want to tell his story.

Many of us, no matter when or where we were raised, have an uncle or aunt whom we remember for the influence they had on us, for better or for worse. It may be a special relationship, unlike that of a mother or father to a son or daughter, at times too close, too weighty for us to come to an understanding of ourselves or the world. That aunt or uncle might be quirky, independent, or always anxious to show you who they are. My uncle Artemio was unique, of emulation not only for me, but for countless Spaniards of my generation, sons and daughters of the Spanish Civil War, growing up on a planet suffering from countless environmental problems. My uncle Artemio was a man with experiences worthy of recording both publicly and privately to anyone willing to listen—avuncular in all senses.¹

A thinker and writer as well as a leading activist in Spain, my mother's brother was vitally committed to the defense of the environment and the creation of a sustainable relationship between human beings and our natural habitat. Indeed, his life is demonstrative of perhaps the most crucial dilemma of our modern/postmodern age: how do we progressive-minded members of civil society incorporate a commitment to social justice that focuses primarily on the urgent planetary need to protect the natural environment that feeds us, houses us, and allows for our very existence? My Tío Artemio made a vital shift in his later life: from a card-carrying (more precisely rifle-carrying) red to a green pacifist.

Moreover, the life of Artemio Precioso provides lessons—historical, political, social, philosophical—that synthesize not only the historical reality of Spain, but that of an entire age beginning in the early twentieth century around World War I and ending at the beginning of the twenty-first century. While Ar-

temio was Spanish and Manchego, like many of his generation, he understood that his nation was a small part of a greater global space, and its connection to that space is crucial to the sustainability of the planet. Given the scope of his experience—he saw firsthand the most significant (albeit catastrophic) events of the twentieth century—I argue (at the risk of hyperbole) that Artemio Precioso’s life reflects the “consciousness of an age,” a phrase attributed to T. S. Eliot, that denotes an event, a movement, a text, or the life of an individual who wrote and lived the vital issues of an entire epoch.

Indeed, Artemio Precioso was born the year of the Russian Revolution. Becoming a committed member of the Spanish Communist Party beginning in 1935, he remained a communist throughout the mid-twentieth century. He later rose through the ranks of the army of the Popular Front in the *Brigadas Mixtas* (Mixed Brigade) during the Spanish Civil War—some called him a hero for reasons we shall see—and escaped to the Soviet Union in 1939, gradually changing his thinking from a Soviet brand of communism to environmentalism in the 1960s. When he returned to Spain, he became one of the founding members of Greenpeace-España. He continued to act, write, and think as a militant *ecologista* until his death six years after 9/11.

Perusing the Life of Artemio Precioso

I refer to him as Artemio Jr. because he is not the only prominent Artemio Precioso in Spanish history. Born in Hellín (Province of Albacete) in 1891, his father, Artemio Precioso García—Artemio Sr.—was a successful writer and editor of three major publishing outlets in Madrid in the 1920s and 1930s. My grandfather’s writing and editorial work were not only well known for their political satire, but also for playful, at times sardonic, descriptions of sexual desire and behavior. They were formative in the early life and maturation of his son.

The son of José Precioso Roche, a landowning entrepreneur who had made a fortune in mining and lumber—or more accurately deforestation—around the transition between nineteenth and the twentieth centuries, he shunned his father’s line of work. Not only was he opposed to cutting down trees, he felt confined by the smallness of his home town. Books, writing, literature, and artistic expression were what most excited Artemio Sr. In his descriptions of his father, Artemio Jr. suggests that in an indirect way, it was through Precioso Sr. that he discovered the joys of reading as well as the respect for the natural world, two seemingly unrelated inclinations, yet for Artemio Jr., intimately connected. His father told him that destruction of trees for the financial benefit of landowners is harmful to society, or so his readings led him to believe. It is

also true that given Artemio Sr.'s social and cultural sensibilities, a precocious secondary school student at a Jesuit school and avid reader, he was known for questioning the pedagogical practices of the clergy.

Artemio Jr.'s father had a lasting effect on him, even though, sadly, political-historical circumstances of Spain in the 1930s and 1940s did not allow the father-son relationship to develop the way both of them would have liked. I know from conversations with my uncle that he shared Artemio Sr.'s conviction (in writing and in practice) that the human body in all its splendor and sexual appetite is a reality worthier of celebration than suppression. In this regard, the father had had great influence on his son's cultural and political formation. And I would add that this open attitude toward the body and rejection of Catholic dogma regarding sex and the sovereignty of humans over the natural world are factors that led Artemio Jr. to his later commitment in defense of the environment.⁴

Indeed, Artemio Precioso García's fame in 1930s and 1940s Spain was a topic of conversation in the Ugarte Precioso family, and the one I recall having most to say about him was his son. Given the historical revisionism of the Franco regime, Artemio Sr.'s life story and accomplishments did not reach public view until the post-Franco years, and my uncle was at least partially responsible for encouraging research on his father among academics and intellectuals.⁵ Looking back at my contact with Uncle Artemio, I recall that in the early 1990s, he was intensely interested in recovering a copy of his father's book-length semi-autobiographical essay on the years he was compelled to move to Paris, *Espanoles en el destierro*.⁶ The book is a penetrating personal, political, and historical account of the lives in Parisian exile of famous Spaniards such as Unamuno, Blasco Ibáñez, and Eduardo Ortega y Gasset, among others. All of these figures were compelled to leave Miguel Primo de Rivera's dictatorship due to their public opposition. Precioso Sr., as a self-described "voltairian," well-known for his veiled satirical allusions to people close to the dictatorship, suffered from several lawsuits alleging defamation of character (Linares xxiv–xxviii) and accusations of fostering pornography. Indeed, it is my conviction that Artemio Sr.'s interest in open discussion and debate on the human body indirectly led to Artemio Jr.'s commitment to environmental justice.

In 1930 came the fall of the monarchy and in 1931 the Second Republic: the world financial crisis of 1929 and popular discontent forced Primo de Rivera to step down. King Alfonso XIII, who had always been subservient to the dictator, abdicated, and with the elections of 1931, the Precioso Ugarte family would return from exile. But not only did the change in government enable a return, it would also make for a new public importance bestowed to the liberal writer and cultural figure who had spent three years as an émigré in Paris.

Artemio Precioso Sr. was named civil governor of Toledo in 1934, and later he would become civil governor of Lugo in Galicia. From a recognized author with unrepentant liberal and anticlerical inclinations, he became a politician, and his son, at age seventeen, would assist him in his duties. Artemio Jr., the soon to be soldier in the Republican army, described himself as his father's aide in the years immediately after the return from France: he helped draft letters, communicate his father's views and decisions, and run errands. Thus, at a young age, he was directly informed of political happenings, always under the open-minded influences of his father, both in the realm of politics and sexual freedom.

As a teenager, Artemio Jr. should have devoted the majority of his time to his studies, but the political situation in his country did not allow him to do so. As the beginning of the Civil War approached, he stayed in Madrid while his father was transferred to Galicia to attend to his duties as civil governor. He studied law sporadically while working in the Ministry of Public Works. As he matured, he became more and more enamored with socialist-communist ideas, unlike his father, along with thousands of other antimonarchical Spaniards yearning for social equality. His hopes, he says in his memories, were based on news arriving from a new country: the Soviet Union, where a new way of life was emerging and the exploitation of human beings was disappearing (Bigues 32), or so Artemio Jr. and many of his generation thought.

Artemio Precioso Jr. had already filled out his enrollment card for the *Juventudes Socialistas* (Socialist Youth), allied with the Spanish Communist Party, when the Francoist Insurgency began on July 18, 1936. On that very day, as Artemio Jr. recalls, he learned that the Spanish Communist Party was distributing rifles on the outskirts of Madrid. Reminiscent of the young George Orwell in *Homage to Catalonia*, Artemio Jr. had no military training, and barely knew how to fire a pistol; he learned military skills hands-on. But unlike Orwell, Artemio turned out to be a proficient soldier. The decision to take up arms, regardless of the perils, he remembers, was the “a great life decision that followed me from then on” (Bigues 33).

As a young recruit in the Fifth Regiment under the command of the veteran radical military official, Julio Mangada, he experienced his first combat. Mangada and his company were instrumental in halting the Nationalist advance toward Madrid in the early months of the war. Mangada's soldiers were transferred to the Aida Lafuente battalion in Talavera about one hundred kilometers from Madrid where the battalion's charge was to head off the Nationalist attempt to take the capital. There, nineteen-year-old Artemio Jr. was wounded. As he describes it, the wound was life-threatening and extremely painful. But as fortune (and privilege) would have it, after his evacuation, he was attended to by an able surgeon. A close friend of his father had alerted the

doctor as to the gravity of Artemio Jr.'s wound, an injury to his left hand that had become infected, causing an onslaught of gangrene. Were it not for the doctor's intervention, Artemio Jr. later commented, he may not have survived; he owed his life to this doctor and to his father (Bigues 35)—and, I might add, to his father's class connections.

That was by no means the end of Artemio Jr.'s military career. His most significant accomplishments occurred in the final months of the war. By 1939, the young soldier had risen through the ranks, promoted to major at age twenty-one in the 206 *Brigada Mixta* in charge of securing the central eastern coast of Spain, an area that, after the fall of Barcelona to the Francoist forces in January of 1939, became the object of attack in what the Nationalists thought would make for the final defeat of the Republican forces. As the well-known historian of the Spanish Civil War, Paul Preston, has explained with great precision, a nationalist victory seemed likely at that time, but Juan Negrín, the Prime Minister of the Popular Front government, strategized that prolonging the war as much as possible with the democratically elected government still in power would make for two possibilities: 1) the democratic countries opposed to the aggression of Hitler and Mussolini would eventually intervene, thus the question of Spain would be re-opened in a world context; and 2) it would allow for a negotiation with Franco from a position of greater strength, including the crucial need for the evacuation of those Republicans desperate to avoid Franco's retaliation.⁷

Yet there were opponents to Negrín's strategy. After three brutal years of fighting and destruction, many in Spain wanted an end to the war. So much so, that a faction within the Republican side, allied with Francoist sympathizers (cryptofascists of the "Fifth Column") wanted to negotiate an immediate truce with Franco. They thought, erroneously, as history shows, that the Nationalists would offer concessions to the government against which they had rebelled. With the aid of a section of the military, headed by colonel Segismundo Casado, the "defeatist" forces conspired against the Negrín government. Artemio Precioso, along with many who remained loyal to the then prime minister were deeply opposed to Casado's plan, a rebellion that had already begun in Cartagena on the central eastern coast. The 206 Brigade, under the command of Artemio Jr., was sent to Cartagena to quell what was considered a second treasonous act, the first one being the insurgency that started the war. When Artemio Jr. arrived in Cartagena ahead of his troops to assess the situation, he and two of his comrades were arrested, but Artemio managed to escape. The following day, March 5, 1939, with the arrival of the 206 Brigade, Cartagena had been retaken and, on March 6, the entire area returned to loyalist control. However, a few weeks later, the remaining part of Republican Spain was under the control of those who ingenuously sought to negotiate an agreement

with Franco, and by extension, liquidate those who did not, most of whom, like Artemio Jr., were members of the Communist Party.

Indeed, the days of the leader of the 206 Brigade were numbered. He had no choice but to leave Spain. How he managed to do so marks yet another of his dramatic life accomplishments. With a handful of soldiers, Artemio Jr. assaulted an airfield held by the enemy with the intent of commandeering three *Dragón Rapide* aircrafts that would take them away from their country. Of special concern was the safety of the leadership of the Party, including Fernando Claudín, a writer who became one of Artemio's deeply influential, life-long friends. But among the would-be rescuers, there were only two who had flight experience; the last of the three *Dragón Rapides* would be piloted by cadets learning how to fly. The first two planes managed to make it to Oran, Algeria, which was then under French control. But the last one, the plane that would take Artemio Jr. to safety, was piloted by apprentices. As Artemio describes his final hours in Spain before the definitive end of the war, he was able to escape by the proverbial skin of his teeth. The takeoff was spectacular, he says; the plane's wheels skimmed the top of the wooden cabin that served as a make-shift air command. They flew over the Mediterranean toward Africa and were about to land in Melilla, which was under Francoist control. In his words,

One of the pilots said, “Mother of God, Franco's land, no?” The plane veers to the left, over a cultivated area close to Sidi-Bel-Abbés. As we lose altitude, we catch a glimpse of a train station where I can see ads for Menier Chocolate. That meant we were in French-controlled Algeria. So down we go with miraculous agility, the pilot manages to land safely in a wheat field. As we exit the plane, a few farmers ask for our military hats, and graciously we hand them over as gifts. Minutes later, the gendarmes appear and take us to a detention center in Oran. (qtd. in Bigues 40)

From the detention center, he was transported to a concentration camp for refugees of the war. Months later, with an invitation from the Communist Party to travel to the Soviet Union, he boarded a ship from Algiers to Marseilles, from there to Paris and Le Havre, and then on to Moscow by train.

Soviet Union and the Environment

At age twenty-two, with all his political and military experience, Artemio Jr. was older mentally than his age suggests. He was prepared to make a life for himself as a civilian in a new country, always thinking about the possibility of finishing his studies. Circumstances, however, compelled him to remain in the military and continue to resist fascism, an ideology and a reality that was, in the 1930s and 1940s, a terrifying menace throughout the “free” world. Artemio Jr. became a cadet in the famous Frunze Soviet military academy, where he and his comrades learned the strategies and techniques of military defense against Hitler’s troops. One of the brightest and ablest of cadets, he became, in the early 1940s, a professor in that academy in charge of educating Soviet soldiers in the techniques and strategies of military defense.

It was later in his life, after the defeat of world fascism in the 1940s that Artemio Precioso Ugarte would begin to question the benefits of Soviet society, and he would do so from the perspective of an environmentalist. With the end of World War II and with years as a loyal member of the Soviet military under his belt, Artemio Jr. was sent to Belgrade to assist Josip Broz, who would later become none other than Marshall Tito, the ruler of the then Yugoslavia, in conjuring strategies that would bring on the downfall of Franco. There, he would collaborate with other notable Spaniards, fellow members of the Communist Party who became known for their intellectual and political critique of Stalinism. Two thinkers and activists, important in their own right, became influential in Artemio Jr.’s intellectual development: Manuel Tagüeña and Fernando Claudín, both of whom were becoming more and more skeptical of the Soviet project and critical of positions they found both outdated and not conducive to real social progress. By 1948, the growing conflict between Stalin and Tito had become public; Tagüeña, Artemio’s intimate friend and comrade, openly supported Tito.

In 1948, Artemio Jr. was sent by the party to what was then Czechoslovakia. There, along with his Spanish comrades, he was given the opportunity to choose a line of work more in keeping with what the Spanish military personnel had done before the Civil War. As a former law student in Spain, Artemio Jr. wanted to continue his studies, but this time as an economist. After finishing his undergraduate training at the Karolinska University (University of Prague), he went on to complete a doctorate in macroeconomic planning. It was in Prague that Artemio Jr. developed his growing anti-Soviet ideas in conjunction with his interest in the environment. He and other professors of economic planning began to question the economic programs dictated by the USSR. As he remembered it, his estrangement from Soviet dogma was becoming palpable. Through discussions among the members of his depart-

ment of economics at the University of Prague, it became clear that it was of prime necessity to study, analyze, and value the natural resources of a nation. The idea of a planned economy, of vital importance in the governments of the Soviet Bloc, he felt that it was paramount to make concrete steps toward connections between economics and ecology, “or more precisely, economic planning and natural resources” (qtd. in Bigues 51). It was a point in his life, he recalls, that would inform his political activity and thought throughout his later years (51–52).

He also related to Bigues that Marxist theory, while in certain ways still pertinent to twentieth-century realities, did not address modern class structures that went beyond the classic division between the bourgeoisie and the working class; modern society had developed gradations within those categories that had to do not only with the relations of production, but also with the relations between human beings and their physical surroundings (Bigues 52). Moreover, there were new world developments, such as the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, that made for a global reality that threatened the future of the planet at the palpable possibility of nuclear destruction. Both the West, organized now into NATO, and the East with the Soviet Union at the helm of the Warsaw Pact, were contributing to future destruction of human beings and the natural world. Thus, Artemio Precioso Jr.’s disillusionment not only with the Soviet Union, but also with the traditional Left, led him to two places, one physical and the other intellectual: he decided he wanted to return to the country in which he was raised, and he moved into a new intellectual space by immersing himself in ideas and texts related to environmental sustainability.⁸

Within the Communist Party, Artemio’s desire to return to Spain was not met with approval; in fact, some called for his expulsion. The higher-ups in the Party decided nonetheless that while he would remain a party member, he would be barred from any position, a decision, he says, that “made me very happy” (qtd. in Bigues 55). But the reentrance into Spain was difficult to say the least. Even so, with the help of acquaintances with diplomatic connections, he did so. For the next decade, however, Artemio Precioso Jr.’s life in Spain as a former Civil War combatant was fraught with political and economic difficulties. He was an exile who had returned to a very different country from the one he was forced to leave, and at the same time, he was a man alienated from the Soviet political structures that had once protected him and provided a way to make a living. Moving back to Spain would be difficult.

Despite Francisco Franco’s gestures at this time to offer the possibility of return to those who had left Spain after the war, there was no guarantee that the return would be free of reprisals. Franco’s state police kept close tabs on Artemio Jr.’s movements and activities; on repeated occasions, they brought

him to police headquarters in the Correos building in the Puerta del Sol, a jail disguised as a post office. At the hands of the infamous Political Social Brigade, a governmental unit designed to monitor and intimidate those the regime saw as dissidents, he was interrogated and forced to spend time in the basement jail cells of the then Correos building.⁹ Artemio Jr. speculates that the real intention on the part of the Spanish authorities was to make life so difficult that he would decide to leave on his own. But by the sixties, the detainments subsided somewhat although it was clear to him that he was still under police surveillance.

Yet Artemio Jr. would never regret or even deviate from his life felt convictions to work for social, human, and environmental progress. With the Prague Spring in 1968, growing criticism and resistance to the power of the Soviet Union in then Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia, coupled with the covert and now overt opposition to Franco, his desire to enter the political conflict began to take hold of him once again. Still persona non grata in the eyes of the Spanish power structure as well as those of the European Soviet leadership, it took him a few years to become active again, but this time, he would no longer act as a member of a political party or even a subscriber to a specific political ideology. Through readings and contacts with environmentalists, he had become more and more restless about the destruction of the natural world, and he had decided to put his convictions into practice regardless of political affiliation. In 1970, the year of the first international Earth Day, the activist spirit of the young Artemio was still alive, while not in the same way as when he joined the communist party in 1934. With growing protests, it would not take long for the Franco regime to lose its authority. The death of the dictator in 1975 began a new period in Spanish history, filled with open dissidence of all kinds, including calls for the defense of the environment. His friendship and collaboration with Fernando Claudín led him to periodicals like *Ajoblanco*, *El Ecologista*, and *Integral*. He recalled to me and to others that he felt the necessity of working within a social movement of ecological justice unaffiliated with a political party (Bigues 65).

Artemio was fifty-eight when Franco died, a man at once eager for socio-ecological change, but at the same time, eager to learn, read, and engage in intellectual exchanges with people who shared his concerns. He was in direct contact with writer-activists such as Pedro Costa Morata, whose book *Nuclearizar España* (Nuclear Spain, 1975), is a classic not only for environmental activists but for all Spaniards. With Fernando Claudín and others, he established a center for “Socio-ecological Studies,” as well as a publication, *Zona Abierta*, that appeared sporadically from 1979 to 2001. Its themes ranged from the future of the welfare state, eurocommunism, nuclear disarmament, the crisis of Marxism, and, of course, the environment, the issue of most

concern to Artemio and Pedro Costa. Artemio contributed to the magazine with editorial leadership as well as his own essays: titles such as “Economic Necessities and Ecology,” “Czechoslovakia and Unreal Socialism” (published under the pseudonym of Asier Vera, his nephew), and “A Green Program for the Spanish Economy.” Moreover, he wrote for other Spanish publications of the 1980s and 1990s on topics linking the creation of employment with ecological sustainability, and the necessity for citizens and governments to act and think according to environmental realities.

As late as 2005, two years before his death, a journal devoted to socio-political issues in Castilla-La Mancha conducted an interview with him titled, “Ecology as a Non-Violent Weapon of the Future,” conducted by Emilio Martínez in which he affirmed the urgency of cleaning the environment: “In matters of ecology I am a conservative, because if we don’t conserve the environment . . . within a few decades, we will have destroyed the planet” (40). Indeed, he called himself a conservative in the correct acceptation of the word. That was my uncle: an excommunist turned ecological preservationist.

Artemio, the Environmental Activist

Artemio Precioso’s legacy derives from his activity, his deeds, his energy always in conjunction with his thought; indeed, one could say that for him, social activity is what produces ideas. Activism was his prime motivator from the time he joined the Spanish Communist Party at age seventeen well into the 1980s when he was in his sixties. As a member and leader of Greenpeace in Spain, there are two events in which he played a major role: 1) on board the Greenpeace ship *Sirius*; and 2) his participation in the attempts at detoxification of Portman Bay, a body of water on the southern Mediterranean coast of Spain, which had become contaminated due to decades of toxic waste from mining.

On the *Sirius*, Artemio was part of a team dedicated to the protection of whales, an issue of major concern to Greenpeace not only in the Mediterranean, but also throughout virtually all of the oceans of the planet since the 1970s. With technological “advances” in methods in whale fishing in the twentieth century, several species of these majestic sea creatures have become endangered, thus contributing to the increasing threats to biodiversity. Greenpeace has done a great deal to curb the loss of whales to economic interests, and in Spain, beginning in the 1980s, there have been dramatic efforts in this regard. In 1984, a Greenpeace vessel named after the star *Sirius* set out on the waters of the Straights of Gibraltar to intercept a Russian whaling ship, the *Derski*, whose fleet was in violation of restrictions of the International Whal-

ing Commission.¹⁰ Artemio, as a fluent speaker of Russian, was in charge of communicating with the whalers. Along with a few other intrepid Greenpeace comrades, he wanted to pressure the captain of the *Derski* to discontinue the illegal activity. Characteristic of Greenpeace's direct-intervention tactics, its representatives (including sixty-seven-year-old Artemio), at tremendous danger to themselves, boarded an inflatable motorized raft from the *Sirius* and headed for the whaling ship to confront those engaged in illegal activity, discuss, and hopefully resolve the tense situation. With patience, determination, and good language skills, he persuaded the Russian commanders to cease and desist a practice that had been sanctioned by an international commission.

How many whales were saved? We will never know, but more important, Greenpeace's action made the news, and with further communication and information regarding the harms of the dramatic loss of whales throughout the world, a healthy tension was created between those people, companies, and governments persistently killing whales for profit, and part of a civil society intent on providing sustainable solutions for those who rely on whales for livelihood.

Two years later, allied with members of Greenpeace who wanted to put a stop to the devastation of Portman Bay (province of Murcia) due to mineral excavation, Artemio Precioso ventured off to an area of Spain close to where he had grown up. Again, in an act of civil disobedience, Greenpeace affiliates (the young, brave, and strong ones) had blocked the pipes through which toxic material was contaminating the Bay. These were mines that had been operating since the days of Franco. According to Greenpeace's calculations the mines were dumping lead, zinc, sulfuric acid, and cadmium at the rate of seven tons per day.¹¹ In response to Greenpeace's action, the mining interests emitted a message through a loudspeaker to the residents of the area: "Those who want to keep their jobs and provide for their children, rise up to oppose Greenpeace" (Bigues 75).

The role Artemio played in this conflict had to do with consciousness-raising. As a committed communist in the 1930s, he was on the side of workers, but he argued publically in tense meetings with the mining executives and political officials of the town of La Unión on Portman Bay that it is possible to clean the waters without the loss of jobs. In fact, if there is political will, he argued, the endeavor to clean Portman Bay could create employment. He placed the issue in a world context by affirming repeatedly, "The experience of the Federal Republic of Germany shows that the protection of the environment does not make for loss of employment: on the contrary, the creation of environmental sustainability creates jobs," and this was feasible in Portman Bay (qtd. in Bigues 76).

In August of 1986, Artemio and the leading representative of Greenpeace, Jordi Bigues, managed to reach an agreement with the company and the town officials to curb the toxic dumping while keeping the mines open. A month later, Peñaroya España, S.A. sold their interests to a new company, Portman Golf, that decided to close the mines until they could reach an acceptable solution. In fact, this new company began to put pressure on town officials to clean the bay and to rezone the mining area for urbanization. Today, there is a Portman Bay Regeneration Project headed by residents of the area to solicit both national and European Union funds to decontaminate the Bay. A major political figure in Andalusia, the former mayor of Córdoba, Rosa Aguilar, is supporting this project. Indeed, the Regeneration Project is ongoing, and suffice to say, Artemio Precioso was a prime mover in the creation of a collective will to return the waters of Portman Bay to their natural splendor (Bigues 75–78).¹²

Artemio Precioso's Philosophical Political and Environmental Legacy

Artemio Precioso's life work reveals political-philosophical lessons regarding the place of environmentalism within the network of ideas and actions calling for progressive social change. His example shows that the socialist-communist-antifascist wave of thinking and practice of the 1930s, with its socialist inclinations and the various attempts to put them into practice in Europe and the Americas, are still worth considering in terms of environmental issues. Despite the intense criticism of socialism in our early twenty-first century as an outmoded, irrelevant, or extreme way of thinking (that is, the attacks on Bernie Sanders and virtually every green politician throughout the world), there is much that we can keep in mind today regarding the urgency of protecting the environment, an urgency that requires a political will, that is, governmental intervention, not just good intentions on the part of polluting corporations.

My uncle was at once an activist and an intellectual, although as many who knew him have pointed out, his energy and inclinations were more in the realm of the former than the latter. In any case, his activism was integrally connected to his thoughts and his writings, texts that manifest a particular predilection for Marxist ideas; he said so himself in numerous conversations with me and in public interviews in the Spanish media. His evolution from communism to ecologism does not represent a break with Marxist philosophy; it is rather a logical intellectual process of reconciling economic realities with the creation of a life in which human beings are one

with their natural world, and that includes instincts, desires, and appetites that make the species *homo sapiens* akin to all animals, something he learned from his father.

In one of his early articles in *Zona Abierta* titled “Economic Needs and Ecology” (1978), he sets out to redefine economic need in a way that recalls Marx’s early writing in its wish to transcend the monolithic faith in the market. He refers to a work by the renowned Hungarian philosopher, Agnes Heller, *The Theory of Need in Marx*. Like Artemio, a dissident of Soviet society, Heller interrogates market-based capitalism through a reading of early Marx regarding the notion of human needs. What she calls “radical needs” go beyond material exigency; they have to do with the fundamental necessity in all of us to realize ourselves as individuals and as members of society.¹³ Artemio modifies Heller’s theory by acknowledging the importance of economic needs, as did Marx, as well as needs of other kinds: he specifies needs of three types: economic needs and the necessities of material survival; political needs such as civil liberties, institutions, and freedoms; and what he calls “individual needs in the realm of private life, such as affection [including sex], esthetic pleasure, self-realization” (“Necesidades” 57). Socialist society, says Artemio, would create an economy that prioritizes all needs: economic, political, and individual. Democratic socialism would determine production according to need and not to whatever can be sold for a profit. He wrote:

Within a socialist-humanist conception of the economy, the motivation behind production is human need; government of a given socialist society would be opposed to any development that counteracts the satisfaction of those needs. In this context, nuclear power, a growing tendency in Spain, would come under severe scrutiny . . . [since] it creates the risk not only of irreversible destruction but the creation [of an authoritarian, militaristic system [in the wake of a disaster]. (“Necesidades” 57)

In another issue of *Zona Abierta*, a lengthy article titled “A Green Program for the Spanish Economy,” Artemio offers his own contribution to what his long-time friend and collaborator, Fernando Claudín, called a “resurgence of Marxist thought” in the Europe of the 1960s. Always mindful of economic realities—indeed, an intellectual ready and eager to put his ideas into practice—he wrote that the conventional perceived conflict between the loss of jobs and the protection of the environment is false. In this article, he is critical of the Spanish Communist Party of the post Franco period urging job growth without attention to the “alarming deterioration of the environment” (Claudín 64).

His critique of an emerging postdictatorship Spain, a country with a promising future at that time, was based on the little concern for agriculture and even less for the environment on the part of so-called progressive political parties: that is, the Spanish Communist Party and the PSOE (Socialist Workers Party). Moreover, none of the supposedly leftist political programs for Spain at that time pointed out specific ways of strengthening the work force through a steadfast governmental determination to clean the environment. As a man always in search for solutions, Artemio Precioso made us aware of human and humane possibilities that come with the defense of the natural world, possibilities that involve increase of jobs, not loss of them. He wrote this in the late 1970s, when the “left,” not only in Spain but in the so called Third World, was barely aware of the growing natural destruction that was in front of them.

Decontamination would have very positive effects on productivity in all sectors, especially in agriculture, and it would also contribute to the growth of the service sector. Cleaning the environment is an essential vehicle leading to an improvement in the quality of life. . . . The commitment to study the grave ecological problems of Spain is another way to expand the professional work force. (Precioso Ugarte, “Un programa verde” 73)

Indeed, if there is anything that Artemio Precioso stood for, if there is anything he could be singled out for among his contributions to social life and thought, it is his conviction, as expressed in both his words and deeds, that efforts to clean and conserve the environment make for economic betterment, not just a cleaner atmosphere.¹⁴

Much of what my uncle Artemio was saying and doing in the years immediately after the death of Franco seem today like a harbinger for the future, not only of Spain, but for many parts of the world. His critique of nuclear energy (such as the disaster of Chernobyl), the lack of governmental attention to sustainable agriculture, the blindness on the part of political-economic interests to the verifiable evidence of economic benefits of environmental betterment (that is, the reality that attention to environmental health creates jobs), the disappearance of species of marine life, the ongoing creation of (false) necessity on the part of consumer capitalism and as a consequence the lack of concern with deeper (radical) human needs, all this was relevant in the years after Franco, and it remains urgent today. My avuncular Artemio, a proud member of the Juventudes Socialistas of the 1930s and 1940s was a man keenly aware of the problems of life in the twenty-first century and their solutions.

There is yet another lesson in the life of my uncle Artemio, both disheartening and promising. In his lifetime, despite his efforts, and those of his comrades in Greenpeace along with other environmentalist organizations, few people in positions of governmental and economic power had the will or courage to put his ideas and reforms into practice, specific reforms based on economic-philosophical-ethical principles that he did his best to make public. While our planet continues to slide into further destruction, it's difficult in the light of information we have today regarding the future of the planet not to throw in the towel. But my uncle never did that, despite the lack of serious attention to his proposals. In the long run, in ways that he himself might not have been aware, consciousness-regarding the urgency of attention to the environment has increased dramatically in the last decades.

The editors of this volume of *Hispanic Issues* have stated the following in the Introduction:

From the perspective of ECS [environmental cultural studies], the functioning of a capitalist economy not only requires a class-based social structure, a state-corporate nexus, the concentration of fixed and mobile capital in a few hands, and the availability of sources of “cheapened” raw materials, but also particular conceptual frameworks that validate and make sense of all the above (Harvey). Both capitalism and communism have required, for example, a modern anthropocentric understanding of humans as exceptional beings (because of their rationality, culture or spirituality) capable of transcending, or emancipating themselves from, their earthly context: humans without limits and without duties toward their nonhuman others, humans that go *per aspera ad astra*. (Beilin and Ares-López)

My avuncular *tío*, in his life, his writing, and his activism, is an incarnation of this conviction, this crucial way of looking at today's global problems.

Addendum (Spring-Summer of 2018)

As I write, a new government in Spain is in the horizon. With the forced departure of Mariano Rajoy of the conservative Popular Party, a departure brought forth by a parliamentary vote of *censura* (or no confidence), the new government has placed environmental issues on its list of priorities, or so it has

announced.¹⁵ One of the declarations that the new president, Pedro Sánchez, has made is that his government plans to do away with a tax on solar energy that the previous government had put into practice through the lobbying efforts of Iberdrola, the mega-energy corporation that provides most of Spain's electricity. Not much to cheer about, some might say, given that this move is something that remedies an absurd law that never should have been legislated in the first place, given Spain's solar capabilities as well as the growing environmental disasters due to carbon emissions. Also in light (or darkness) of PSOE's past environmental behavior and policies—that is, that it has not been immune from succumbing to the tentacles of the Iberdrola lobby—Spaniards should be skeptical about the government's promise. But the fact that President Sánchez has stated his interest in the environment publicly and that this interest has become a greater part of the daily news in Spain represents a trend that Artemio Jr. would celebrate. He often reiterated in conversation something of which we proponents of environmental sustainability have been well aware for decades: that technological-scientific expertise exists to protect the environment; what we need is political will. If this political will ever becomes a full-fledged reality, Artemio's nieces, nephews, and fellow citizens will look back on his life with a sense that something else is possible.¹⁶

Notes

1. "Avuncular," according to the Oxford dictionary, in its anthropological acceptance, refers to an uncle's relationship to his nieces and nephews. For some reason, aunts don't fit the bill. But those of us in the modern age know that aunts can be just as avuncular as uncles or more so.
2. See John Gilroy's seminal essay, "The Ideology of Canon Formation: T.S. Eliot and Cleanth Brooks."
3. The main source for my information on Artemio Jr.'s life is *Artemio Precioso Ugarte (1917–2007): La lealtad y el entusiasmo* by Jordi Bigues, who was an intimate friend and collaborator with Precioso Ugarte in Greenpeace from the late 1980s to his death. This book first appeared in pamphlet form distributed by Greenpeace (España) shortly after my uncle died. This new edition, revised by Bigues with some testimonials (one by yours truly), came about as the result of the efforts of the administrators of the Instituto de Estudios Albacetenses in the summer of 2017. My essay, as I point out in many of the citations, draws much on Bigues's biography for specific information. However, the speculative aspects are my own. I rely as well on my own memories of my uncle.
4. See Artemio Precioso García's novel, *El hijo legal*, a partly autobiographical story of a man who saw first had the harmful effects of corporal punishment in parochial schools

of the 1920s in Spain. Later, he became known for being a “volterian.” For further information on Artemio Precioso García, see: Linares and Martínez Arnaldos. Linares is in the process of writing a complete biography of Artemio Precioso García. The Larson/Zamostny collection of essays on “Kiosk Literature” discusses Artemio Precioso’s work as an editor. Maite Zubiaurre’s engaging and in my opinion pioneering *Cultures of the Erotic in Spain* also contains much information on Artemio Precioso García as an editor who did much to promote the writing of authors who found his financial support invaluable.

5. In the mid-1990s, my uncle was in contact with several academics, one of whom was Manuel Martínez Arnaldos. See Martínez Arnaldos for information on the founding and history of publication of *La Novela de Hoy*. The bibliography is invaluable (66–107). The series’ first novella appeared in 1922, *El momento difícil* by Pedro Mata (number 1), and the last one was *El collar de Afrodita* by Cristóbal de Castro published in 1932 (number 525). As Martínez Arnaldos and Zubiaurre have asserted, Artemio Sr. was known for his policy (a lucrative one as it turned out) of emphasizing an attractive cover and an engaging, even provocative, prologue that offered personal information about the author.
6. My uncle would be delighted, if he had lived long enough, to see the new edition of *Españoles en el destierro* edited with a lengthy introductory essay by Francisco Linares (2016).
7. Paul Preston’s remarkably detailed history of the final months of the Civil War and his convincing explanation of what they meant for the difficult (indeed horrific) years immediately after 1939 are filled with references to Artemio Precioso’s role in the struggle to quash the inner coup against the Second Republic by Colonel Casado and his cohorts. See chapter 10.
8. I use the notion of disillusionment as a reference to the famous essay by Emma Goldman, *My Disillusionment in Russia*. While not for exactly the same reasons, Artemio Jr.’s disillusionment comes from the same roots as that of Goldman.
9. In the days of the Franco dictatorship, what people referred to as the “Correos” building on the Puerta del Sol turned into “Gobernación” during his dictatorship. That building housed his infamous security forces, the DGS (Dirección General de Seguridad).
10. See “El barco Sirius intenta bloquear el paso.”
11. See “El desastre natural de la Bahía de Portman, AMYCA (Ambiente y Calidad).”
12. See “Portman Bay Regeneration Project.”
13. Agnes Heller was influenced by the writings and positions of Georg Lukács who took issue not only with Soviet communism in his native Hungary, but also with certain accepted tenets of Marxism-Leninism (see Michael Lowy, *The Theory of Revolution in the Young Marx*). Artemio Precioso Jr. was part of the movement of internal critics of the Soviet bloc in terms of its major conceptual and practical flaws in post-war Soviet society. See Asier Vera (Artemio’s pseudonym) in an article heavily critical of the former Czechoslovakia for its “unreal socialism” (“Checoslovaquia”). He used

the pseudonym to protect his export-import. I find it interesting that ideologues of Soviet dissidence, like Heller, referred often to the writings of the young Marx, as Lowy articulates. Lowy also wrote a favorable review of Enzo Traverso's *Left Wing Melancholia* ("An Invisible Underground River") in which he expresses his agreement with Traverso that the so-called failures of the antifascist left in the 1930s and 1940s and the subsequent discontent need not be considered as defeatist, rather that political melancholy might be read as the admission of the need for a reexamination and recommitment to socialist principles. There is nothing in these books on the environment. The life of my uncle Artemio provided a remedy to this absence in his commitment, intellectual as well as practical, to the defense of the environment.

14. All that said, among some environmentalists, the view that there are environmentalist implications in Marxist philosophy and economics, even as put forth in the early (humanist) Marx, counters a basic flaw in productivist thinking, including that of Marx. When Marx and others refer to "necessities," they address themselves to human necessities at the expense of the natural world—a basic assumption at the root of much, if not all, of the decline of the environment. In a book my uncle gave me and encouraged me to read around 1995 titled *A New Green History of the World* (translated into Spanish as *Historia verde del mundo*), the author, Clive Ponting, makes precisely that argument. He has little faith in those who argue for economic production to fulfill human necessity, as did Marx. That my uncle read this book with great interest suggests that he too had his doubts about Marxism as a philosophy with environmentalist inclinations. This book sits on my shelf in an apartment on beachfront property in Campello (Alicante), an area whose natural splendor has fallen precipitously since the development of tourism. It is yet another contradiction in the lives of those of us who want to save the environment in spite of ourselves.
15. "El Gobierno de Pedro Sánchez da otro golpe al impuesto al sol." See also Sanhermelando.
16. Two years after Artemio Jr. passed, Greenpeace-España sponsored a yearly award in his name celebrating the accomplishments, activism, and writing (or all of them combined) of a person who has worked for the conservation and defense of the environment. The first person to receive this award was novelist Manuel Rivas for his eloquence and actions protesting the *Prestige* oil spill in 2002. See "Manuel Rivas Galardoneado premio Artemio Precioso."

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