

# **José Ignacio Martín-Artajo Saracho – b 1932, Madrid; d 14 April 2005, Gerona**

**Anarchist, diplomat, blasphemer, poet and man of letters**

Stuart Christie

October 2014

My first meeting with the dynamic and generous-spirited writer José Martín-Artajo (Pepe) was... in London in the early part of 1968. It was a year after he broke completely with his bourgeois past and walked out of his career as a Francoist diplomat, following the US-led colonels' coup in Greece in April 1967. He had been first secretary at the Spanish Embassy in Athens. At the same time he separated from his German wife, Christa von Petersdorff, a psychoanalyst and translator of the works of Freud into French. Christa and Pepe met while she was researching her PhD on the comparative myth of 'Don Juan' in France, Italy and Spain. After the split she always said, with a smile, that she had 'known Don Juan personally'.

After leaving Greece José Martín-Artajo moved to Coolhurst Road in London's Crouch End (where I was living at the time) with his then partner, the ethnomusicologist and broadcaster Lucy Durán. Lucy, whom he had met in Athens, was the daughter of Republican civil war general Gustavo Durán Martínez.

The son of Alberto Martín-Artajo, right-wing Catholic, pro-monarchist and Franco's Foreign Minister from 1945 until 1957, José Martín-Artajo came from 'impeccable' Francoist, Integrist Catholic stock (an uncle became a Jesuit), and was a rebel from early youth. In the early 1950s he was arrested by the Gestapo-trained Brigada Politico Social for anti-Francoist activities, but instead of going to jail his father had him 'sectioned' on grounds of mental illness, a common ploy among the well-placed Francoist elite with dissident children, a device they shared with their opposite numbers in the Soviet Union and elsewhere, including the US according to Kurt Vonnegut's novel 'God Bless You Mr Rosewater', in which the young son of a wealthy bourgeois family wishes to become a firefighter – "Where's the profit in THAT?"

In his London years (1967–76), José Martín-Artajo (Pepe) became closely involved with the work of the Anarchist Black Cross, the Centro Ibérico, and latterly, in Paris, through Octavio Alberola, with Pepe Martínez of the libertarian Spanish-language publishing house Ruedo Ibérico.

In 1976, having put him in touch with my old comrade and cell-mate, the recently released Luis Andrés Edo, secretary general of the CNT and editor of *Solidaridad Obrera*, José Martín-Artajo returned to Spain after 9 years of exile where he threw himself into the task of helping rebuild the CNT and the Spanish Libertarian Movement. According to Federica Montseny, Martín-Artajo

'fell into the wrong hands' in London, Paris and Barcelona (she was referring to among others Miguel García, Albert Meltzer and myself in London, Octavio Alberola in Paris, and Luis Andrés in Barcelona).

In December 1979, the director of the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam (IISG), Rudolf de Jong, refused to accept the credentials of José Martín-Artajo, Luis Andrés and Victor León as official representatives of the CNT, sent to negotiate the return of the union's archives (the ('Amsterdam Boxes'), which had been deposited there since the end of the Spanish Civil War. De Jong's obduracy led to the three comrades occupying the IISG main hall and CNT lawyer Pep Castells being sent to join them with a letter confirming their authority from newly elected CNT secretary general José Bondía. Even so, de Jong still refused to authorise the archives' release and it wasn't until the eve of the Xmas holidays (22 December), following a serious shouting match (in German) between Martín-Artajo and the IISG director, that an agreement was reached. The archives were returned to the CNT in Spain the following year.

In 1980, the prestigious publishing house Ediciones Júcar published his novel, *Tigre Jack La vuelta de Ulises, El pecado del espíritu: prosas atroces*. Pepe also edited the military memoirs of Lucy's father, Gustavo Durán, *Una enseñanza de la guerra española: glorias y miserias de la improvisación de un ejército ...*

His other published works of fiction include *Fiesta a Oscuras* (Ediciones Era, Mexico 1975), a critical attack on the repressive Catholic and bourgeois society in which he grew up, and *Historia de la misteriosa desaparición de Porfiria Santillana, fragona española en país superdesarrollado* (Joaquín Mortiz, Mexico 1970). There was also another novel based on his time as consul in Frankfurt.

Incidentally, it was also José Martín-Artajo who, entirely out of his own salary and savings, generously, selflessly (and quietly), funded and maintained Miguel García's famous hostelry and international anarchist social centre, the Bar La Fragua in Barcelona's carrer Cadena.

In those early post-Francoist years, Artajo's connections with the so-called 'Apaches' of the CNT and the international activists of the movement made him vulnerable to provocations, one of which was an unsuccessful attempt by Antonio Navarro, a police agent infiltrated into the FAI (Iberian Anarchist Federation) to implicate him in an arms-smuggling operation.

The first time I returned to Spain, in 1981, with my 3-year-old daughter Branwen, Pepe was waiting for us with his diplomatic credential at the airport arrivals lounge – just in case the police decided to detain me. Fortunately they didn't

In 1984 Spain's first socialist government wanted him out of the way and sent him off as cultural attaché to their embassy in Caracas and later, in 1990, to Brasilia. It was a difficult decision for him to accept the posting, which he did only after lengthy discussions with close comrades, including Luis Andrés Edo and Octavio Alberola, who appreciated how useful he could be to the movement in such a position. However, once installed in the Caracas embassy he became an important conduit and helped at least 5 wanted comrades escape to safety in South America. They entered the country through Colombia, which at the time required only a 'weekend-pass', where José Martín-Artajo arranged for the pass to be changed to a visa, which allowed them to move on, with the help of comrades, and establish themselves in Brazil, Bolivia or Nicaragua.

José Martín-Artajo spent the later years of his life in Massanes, Gerona (with his second wife, Marisa Ares, and his son Josta, born in 1992) writing and translating Chinese literature and poetry

into Spanish. He has left many unpublished manuscripts. He also has a daughter, Iris, by his first wife, Christa von Petersdorff.

Throughout this time he worked closely with Edo, who was with him when he died.

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Retrieved on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2021 from [www.katesharpleylibrary.net](http://www.katesharpleylibrary.net)

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