

IN MEMORIAM
FEDERICO CORRIENTE
(14.XI.1940–16.VI.2020)*

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These blue days and this childhood sun ... This is the last verse written by Antonio Machado, found by his brother José in the pocket of the poet's threadbare coat when he arrived in Collioure in freezing February 1939. Professor Federico Corriente passed away some months ago and this brought to my memory this lonely, unfinished verse, as the last works that Professor Corriente had been working on have remained.

When I first met Professor Corriente, it was a freezing day. It happened in Granada, a cold February day, with a blue sky that cast its light on the pavement of Gran Vía. There he was, humming I do not know which aria, with a few sheets in his hand, standing next to the doorway of a building. He did not allow me to get to where he was, but coming forward he came to meet me, he shook my hand and said with that jovial tone that characterized his always interesting conversations. How are you? – he said – I was looking forward to meeting you. A kind of electric shock ran through all my bones. Why should someone of intellectual stature like him need to know me? I felt a strange feeling invading me, most likely by his imposing presence. Yes, that was it.

But Federico – as he wanted that we call him by his first name, once camaraderie had been established (how he liked this term!) – was like that. He gave everything for his friends, he gave himself away thoroughly, one would say that he went out of his way for that state of full camaraderie that he liked so

* This text, with slight changes, is the English version of the Spanish original published the day after Federico Corriente's death on the website of Casa Árabe <<https://www.casaarabe.es/noticias-arabes/show/fallece-el-arabista-federico-corriente>> (last accessed 11 March 2020).

much. That is why he always fled from the idea of forming a 'school', but rather replaced it with a group of friends, of comrades. And that is what he has done during all these years. But not only for that, but also for as many colleagues or students as were interested in this or that subject of Arabic or Semitic studies, whether it was a linguistic, philological, historical or literary matter, he was always ready, with his vast wisdom, to impart knowledge and teaching, both inside and outside of Spain. Because Federico was, he still is, a Master, a great Master. What would have become of many of us, some directly, others indirectly, without his teachings, without his enormous personality, which encompassed everything wherever he was?

He was, and he still is, a great Master, like those masters who know themselves to be a link in a chain that should not be cut off. Like those masters who know their role well and dedicate themselves with courage to fulfilling the task that life has entrusted to them: to pass on their knowledge in the best possible way so that those who come after them do the same, thus honoring the well-known Latin sentence *Corona magistri discipulus est*. And it is not an easy matter to fulfill, but Federico knew that this was his role and he gave himself to it with all his strength, with all his intelligence, which was certainly impressive, with a prodigious memory and innate abilities, surely inherited from his parents, teachers, who did a formidable job in his early years. And all this in a disinterested way, without expecting anything in return, without wishing to have 'his school'. « Spain and I are like that », a famous sentence he used to say to describe his selfless interest. He was, he still is, certainly unique.

Federico has given us an immense legacy, both in teaching and research. His potential was already glimpsed in his PhD Thesis – as unusual in our country as formidable – defended on June 23, 1967, with which he not only left an imprint of the enormous budding researcher potential that he already exhibited, but he also showed that he was a thousand light-years from the academic reality around him. His stay at Dropsie University (Philadelphia), a determining factor in his academic education, as he liked to remember, was essential for his later activity as a linguist. After the American period and his return to Spain, he undertook a decisive task for Arabic studies in our country, as he graciously provided dictionaries, grammars and lexical glossaries by frequency index with which to face, with methodological accuracy, the learning and teaching of the Arabic language. We all owe him so much for this effort – as it consumed part of his energy in some key years of his research activity – that it is difficult to determine if we have duly thanked him for all this. However, he was aware of the need for these materials in the Spanish language and did not hesitate one iota to undertake this endeavor, certainly in an exemplary and fruitful way, like everything he did throughout his fruitful life.

And despite this titanic work to which we all owe so much, in no way did he neglect his research. Quite the contrary, an overwhelming bibliography, a collection of highly rigorous studies and great scientific value describe his intense and rich academic career. A pioneer of linguistic studies on the Arabic language in Spain, and also of comparative Semitics, he has endowed Arabic studies with works that are difficult to overcome in the field of lexicography and of course on the Andalusí dialect. But not only this, since we have, among others, his enormous task dedicated to translations and studies of literary texts, from the earliest times, the *Mu'allaqāt*, to modern texts (Tawfīq al-Ḥakīm), passing through Andalusí strophic poetry (*ḥaraǧāt*, *muwaššahāt*, *azǧāl*), as well as work in other fields such as editing and translation of sources, among which the *Muqtabis* of Ibn Ḥayyān should even be mentioned. All of this was duly recognized with his appointment as a member of both the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, and the Royal Academy of the Spanish Language.

Prof. Federico Corriente has started his last journey after enjoying fruitful years with his wife Asun, companion and confidant of so many experiences... Prof. Corriente began his journey in the difficult post-war days, when the month of November of the year 1940 was fourteen. And he left us when spring was still smiling, on June 16, 2020, a blue day, like those of his childhood spent in Granada, Valencia and Tenerife... He left with a smile, with his seraphic smile. Because Federico was, he still is, unique, irreplaceable, unrepeatable. It will take time to find, if it ever comes, someone like him. The void that he leaves, the emptiness we feel is immense, like someone who loses his father and feels alone and helpless. That is how we feel, but in some way we are also happy, because he has bequeathed us a knowledge that we have an obligation to preserve and, to the extent that each of us can, increase it, as he liked to say, thereby honoring his memory and his teaching.

Rest in peace Professor Federico Corriente.