

Martha Banta, Distinguished Professor of English, *Emerita*, at the University of California, Los Angeles, died on March 31, 2020 at her home in Pasadena, where she had been convalescing after a fall. She was 91 years old.

An iconoclastic and prolific scholar of American literature and culture, Professor Banta published eight books on a wide range of subjects, four of them since her retirement from teaching in 1998. At the time of her death, she had completed a ninth manuscript about Plato's influence in literary history and had been working on a tenth, about the American love of "little wars." Banta was throughout her career a scholar of Henry James, the subject of her first book, *Henry James and the Occult*, and wrote the introduction to one volume of his complete letters, a continuing project at the University of Nebraska Press. For Penguin and Oxford World Classics, Banta edited and introduced works by James, Edith Wharton, and Thorstein Veblen. She was also Associate Editor of the *Columbia Literary History of the United States* and Editor and contributor to *The Harper American Literature* anthology.

Banta served as president of the American Studies Association from 1990-91, which awarded her the Carl Bode-Norman Holmes Pearson Prize for Lifetime Achievement and Service in 2002. From 1997-2000, she also served as editor of *PMLA*, the journal of the Modern Language Association, while she transformed its look through cover art. She received from the MLA the Jay B. Hubbell Award for Lifetime Achievement in 2005. The announcement of this award stated, "In ways that are striking for a literary scholar, Professor Banta's work has helped us 'see' our national past through new eyes."

In her books, Banta displayed an extraordinary range of interest in American culture. Coming in at 844 pages and with 500 illustrations (without the aid of digital technology and the internet), her 1987 book *Imaging American Women: Ideas and Ideals in Cultural History* (Columbia) explored Americans' anxious obsession about identity from 1876-1918 and the rendering of women as types. The book brought Banta's meticulous research to bear on diverse materials, including the practices of recitation, pantomime, dramatic posing, and poster art. Banta portrays how mass and elite culture assigned women the impossible task of civilizing a world they were at the same time excluded from and accused of feminizing. Considered either "moral bores or cultural excrescences" yet expected to civilize the world, represented through idealized images as Liberty, Imperialism, and technologized Progress yet excluded from male spheres of activity, when they did enter male professions, women were accused of losing the feminine ideal.

Martha Banta's other books include *Failure and Success in America: A Literary Debate*, (Princeton, 1987); *Taylored Lives: Narrative Productions in the Age of Taylor, Veblen, and Ford* (Chicago, 1993); *Barbaric Intercourse: Caricature and the Culture of Conduct, 1841-1936* (Chicago, 2003); *One True Theory & The Quest for an American Aesthetic* (Yale, 2007); *Words at Work in Vanity Fair* (Palgrave, 2011); and *Henry James: An Alien's "History" of America* (Sapienza, 2016). *Taylored Lives* explores the remaking of narratives under systems imposed on individual lives in the early 20th-century, systems of scientific management, efficiency, and the cult of the machine.

Born on May 11, 1928, Martha Banta grew up in Muncie, Indiana, receiving both her B.A. (in 1950) and her PhD (in 1964) at Indiana University. In between, however, throughout the 50's, she worked in New York City in advertising and as a copy editor in the magazine world, a career that would shape her academic interests and editorial talents – and make her an avid fan of the television series *Mad Men*. In her last job in New York, she worked for Diana Vreeland at *Harper's Bazaar*, where she hired a young and unknown Andy Warhol to work on an ad campaign for shoes. (Perhaps her life's only regret was that she threw away his shoe drawings.)

After teaching as an assistant professor at UC Santa Barbara from 1964-70, Martha Banta was hired as an associate professor at the University of Washington, where she taught for 13 years before moving to UCLA in 1983. A woman of formidable intelligence in a small frame, Professor Banta will be missed by generations of grateful graduate students at Washington and UCLA whose careers she shaped and whose lives she continued to touch to the end.