

II Reports, News, Announcements

Maria Palleiro

Martha Teresa Blache

(1933–2016)

DOI 10.1515/fabula-2016-0008

Martha Blache passed away in Buenos Aires, Argentina, on January 24th, 2016. Born on December 23rd, 1933, she obtained her degree in Folklore from Buenos Aires University in 1962, and a Ph. D. in Folklore from Indiana University in 1977. Her dissertation, *Structural analysis of Guarani: Memorates and Anecdotes*, revisited and later published, encouraged the study of folk narrative in Argentina.

She served as head of the Folklore Section of the Anthropology Institute at Buenos Aires University (1984–1993) and founded the *Revista de Investigaciones Folklóricas* (Review of Folklore Research), whose twenty-one numbers appeared from 1986 to 2006. She was also chair of General Folklore in the Department of Anthropology, Buenos Aires University, as well as Scientific Researcher of the Argentinean National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (1987–2006). Head of the scientific staff at the Argentinean National Institute of Anthropology, up to 1987, and director of grants, doctoral and research projects in Buenos Aires University (1985–1988) as well as in the National Council for Scientific Research (1989–2003), she also received a special award in Folklore from the Konex Foundation, and had recently been appointed as a member of the Argentinean Folklore Academy.

Martha received scholarships from Indiana University (1963–67), the Fulbright Commission (1977), the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (1989) and Turku University (1991). She has also been a member of the Editorial Board of Folklore Fellows (Finland) and the Vice-President for Latin America of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research.

Her research was focused on oral narratives, particularly on contemporary legends, considering the significance in the social context, from a performance-centered theoretical perspective, whose results have been published in local and international contexts. She wrote five books and seventy-five articles, published in scientific journals of Argentina, Latin and North America. Among these publications, it is worth mentioning *Estructura del miedo. Narrativas folklóricas guaraní-*

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ticas (*Structure of fear. Guaranytical folk narratives*) (1982) in which she revisited her doctoral thesis, with the addition of a semiotic approach to folk narrative texts collected in 1972–1974, between Paraguayan migrants in Buenos Aires. Martha also renewed Latin American Folklore studies by publishing theoretical articles from North American and European folklorists. In this way, she edited two compilations, *Narrativa folklórica (Folk narrative) I and II* (1994, 1995), preceded by an „Introduction“ in which she explained the main trends and topics of contemporary folk narrative studies. These books show her style of working, focused on offering an updated state of art of the main theoretical discussions all over the world. The pre-text of these compilations were the seventeen numbers of the *Folklore Series* (1986–1992), published by the Department of Anthropology, Buenos Aires University. To accomplish this editorial task, Martha organized a team of translators and revisers. In the Argentinean context of the renaissance of democracy after a military dictatorship in which certain books and authors had been forbidden, this systematic task of translating contemporary theoretical works in Folklore implied a revolution not only in Folklore studies but also in Communication and Social Sciences.

The same style was reflected in the compilation *Folklore urbano. Vigencia de la leyenda y los relatos tradicionales (Urban Folklore. Updated overview of legends and folktales, 1998)*, that offered an updated state of art of the studies in contemporary legend and its relationship with mass media. With an introductory study written by Martha, the opening article of Linda Dégh, “What is the legend after all?”, served as conceptual framework for the entire book, in which local scholars analyzed Argentinean urban legends in the relationship with global contexts.

Martha also organized both, the visits to Argentina of foreign folklorists, linguists and social scientists as well as the visits of Argentinean scholars to the most important centers of Folklore studies throughout the whole world. Thanks to this effort, Argentina was included in the academic world map of Folklore studies. It is worth mentioning that she started her academic career between two Argentinean military periods (1966–1973, and 1976–1983), in which Folklore studies were focused mainly on rural areas and peasant cultures. Thanks to her, performance-centered studies and contemporary legend won a place in the Argentinean academic context.

Martha was not only an outstanding scholar but also a dear person. After her retirement, she gave away the books of her library, as a present to young scholars interested in Folklore, in a generous way of constructing her academic heritage. She remains in our memory both as a brilliant scholar, a generous teacher and a democratic Argentinean citizen. I would like to remember her also as a clever and tender mother whose son, Juan Seda (PhD), lawyer and anthropologist, continues Martha’s heritage by developing new trends in both disciplines.