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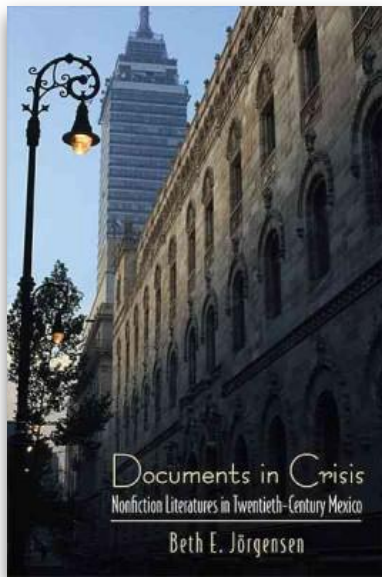
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RESEÑA

Jørgensen, Beth E. *Documents in Crisis: Nonfiction Literatures in Twentieth-Century Mexico*. Albany: SUNY P, 2011. 224 págs.



THIS RECENT book by Beth Jørgensen won the Best Book Award in 2012 by the Mexican Section of the Latin American Studies Association (LASA). It is evident to the reader that this is well-deserved recognition given the ambitious scope of this study and its success in rendering the topic of nonfiction in an effective and clear manner. In a previous coedited volume (*The Contemporary Mexican Chronicle* —2002—, also published by SUNY Press), the author had brought the attention to the chronicle as a nonfictional discourse, and in this opportunity she explores other factual narratives throughout the 20th century in Mexico. The central premise of *Documents in Crisis* is that factual narratives respond to situations of crisis by constructing meaningful

narratives to these contexts of changes. In the past century, and among many national upheavals, there were some events that marked turning points in Mexican history. The first one of them, opening symbolically a new nationalistic era, was the Revolution that started in 1911. As Jørgensen shows in her book, this event was a detonator of multiple written accounts claiming factual accuracy. Among them, the author focuses on memoirs, biographies, to discuss diverse degrees of facticity in the writings of the Mexican Revolution. At the end of the 20th century, another rebellion took place and gained visibility through literary accounts by acclaimed journalists as Monsiváis, Poniadowska or Guillermprieto. These writers, among other many intellectuals, travelled to Chiapas to witness an indigenous movement and its charismatic leader in the midst of a historical convention. If the Revolution of 1911 sought to inscribe the country in a modern paradigm of national progress, the insurrection of the Lacandona forest signaled the ultimate crisis of that nationalistic program and its traditional institutions. By studying authors whose work belong within these two temporal markers, this study presents itself as an insightful analysis of modern narrative in Mexico. The attempt to analyze different genres, authors, and decades, fits into a consistent discussion around the logic of

nonfiction narratives following a twofold inquiry: on the one hand, Jörgensen analyses how the author/persona behind the writing contributes to the notion of the narrative as a real account, a story anchored in facticity; and this inquiry is followed in the different chapters by the critical review of the generic specificities and narrative strategies that contribute to the consideration of a text as a legitimate member of the nonfictional narrative family.

Another crucial consideration within Jörgensen's analysis is the attention given to the framing of the nonfiction texts. By discussing the role played by prologues, notes, authorial comments, she highlights the notion of nonfiction as a mode of reading and not just a mode of writing. In other words, the narratives of nonfiction are presented through this contractual agreement between writer and reader. Coincidentally, *Documents in Crisis* opens with a first chapter that functions as a conceptual framework for the following chapters, each one dedicated to particular authors and themes.

The second chapter, for example, discusses various writings of the Mexican Revolution focused on portrayals of Pancho Villa. Although Martín Luis Guzmán and Nellie Campobello are familiar names to many readers, Jörgensen takes the opportunity to present a less known author Anita Brenner (*The Wind That Swept Mexico*) and to make the case for her use of photography as a recording device which reinforces the facticity and historicity of the representation. In chapter three, the turn comes to the autobiographical writing using the works of José Vasconcelos and María Luisa Puga as significant samples of this type of self-referential representation. Chapter four serves as a transitional section through the last two chapters, which I consider the most convincing section of this book. It is in the analysis of the chronicle and some of its paradigmatic authors (Monsiváis, Poniatowska, Villoro) that the correlation between "experiences of crisis and the documentary impulse" seems most direct and comprehensive. I say this with the risk of giving my own *generic* preference away, since I share with the author the admiration for such an intellectual practice in contemporary Mexico. But setting this predisposition aside, the sections of the book dedicated to presenting the subgenre of the chronicles of disasters or the reflections around the figure of subcomandante Marcos offer a very solid argumentation about some nonfiction devices and functions that help readers understand the multiple layers of that contractual agreement among texts and audiences. Reality, as the portraits of subcomandante Marcos or Pancho Villa show, is never

univocal and/or unidimensional, and its narrative renderings simultaneously document a particular perception as well as an authorial intention.

Documents in Crisis is a recommended reading to those interested in a comprehensive historiographical review of 20th century Mexican narrative. Moreover, the diverse corpus studied by Jørgensen brings our attention to some authors and titles rarely included in more conventional or canonical reviews. The organization of the content through chapters focused in particular genres, is a feature that allows for other scholars to concentrate and/or work with a particular section of the book. In this regard, I can anticipate that this volume will invite diverse dialogues with academic audiences and disciplines.

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