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Memories of loss and anguish in Mexico

FICTION Fifty years after the Yankees invaded Mexico City, one man is still haunted by the events — and his response.

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Solares

With “Yankee Invasion,” Ignacio Solares examines a pivotal point in Mexican history, the 1847 invasion of Mexico City by U.S. troops. It’s an era that, according to Carlos Fuentes, who wrote the book’s introduction, has been “mostly ignored by Mexican literature.”

Solares earns Fuentes’ praise for resisting the temptation to provide a “simplistic view of the powerful USA overcoming the weak Mexican Republic.” Indeed, as the story’s narrator, Abelardo, tries to pin down the causes and stages of the invasion, the process is like unraveling a ball of yarn and discovering a mass of knots.

The book itself feels that way at times. Abelardo, still haunted by the invasion 50 years later, is trying to write a history from notes and newspaper clippings. His tales are interspersed with observations from Dr. Urruchua, his friend and physician.

Where Urruchua is in the thick of things during the invasion, wearing himself out as he tends to the hundreds of dying and injured, Abelardo is a curiously removed presence. He is heartened by the fervor of the peasants who fight tooth and nail against the invaders, but he’d rather be barricaded inside his house, making love to his fiancée.

He despairs of Gen. Santa Anna’s cowardice and treachery, but when he himself is violently drawn into the mayhem of the Yankees’ conquest of Mexico City, he beats a retreat to his waiting horse and coach. And rather than confront his prospective father-in-law, a Yankee sympathizer, the young Abelardo manufactures an insult that allows him to abandon the whole family.

This curious protagonist, with his migraines and spells, seems so buffeted by the past and his own deeply submerged emotions that it’s difficult for him to act. And in this history lesson, Solares lets readers feel Abelardo’s pain. When his wife prods him to write this accounting, Abelardo counters, “From the time of my birth until I was almost thirty, from 1821 to 1850, in addition to the trau-

matic wars and foreign invasions, we suffered through no less than fifty changes of government, almost all the result of armed uprisings. ... Who wants to spend their time remembering such things?”

This may be, as Fuentes says, an important book for Mexican audiences, but in bringing out an English translation, Minnesota co-publishers Scarletta Press and Aliform Publishing have performed a service for U.S. readers interested in current U.S./Mexico relations.

In addition to a list of the era’s influential Mexican writers, the book includes a timeline and maps that show the dramatic changes wrought by the invasion. Five months later, with the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, the United States paved the way for a withdrawal from Mexico City while taking half of the country’s territory, from Texas to California, in exchange for just \$15 million.

Kathe Connair is a Star Tribune copy editor.



YANKEE INVASION

By: Ignacio Solares.
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300 pages, \$14.95.

Review: A sensitive, multifaceted view of historical events that led to Mexico ceding nearly half of its territory to the United States.