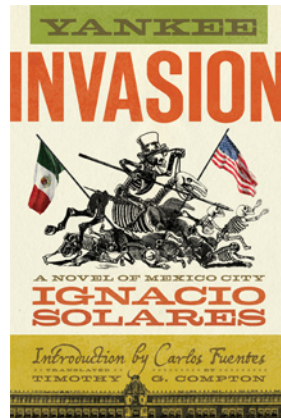


YANKEE INVASION
Ignacio Solares
 translated by
Timothy G. Compton
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by Matthew Thrasher

Imperialism is hardly ever a nice thing: all the precise, seemingly ossified distinctions between progress and regress, invasion and insurrection, and colonizer and colonized vanish in the bloody maelstrom of flying bullets and wounded soldiers and civilians. Ostensibly a war of land and resources, imperial conquest is, more importantly, a war of words: nationalists, socialists, rebels, collaborators, traitors, and patriots are all at lexicographical loggerheads. Each group duking it out for definitions and lays the smack down for symbols (our flag, our heroes, our higher purpose). In the ensuing deluge, warring factions continually draw and redraw that ever-elusive line between us and them, them and us.

Ignacio Solares, the renowned academic, editor, and novelist, foregrounds this messy impasse in his 2005 novel, *Yankee Invasion*. A bestseller in Mexico, the novel vacillates, equivocates, and does all sorts of nasty things which consistently defy any harmonious or didactic political reading of the text. Far from a seething polemic against the U.S.'s unsavory 1848 annexation of Mexico's northernmost territories (55% of its total land), Solares's narrative is instead a densely packed cornucopia of consonant worldviews: both Mexicans and Yankees extol the palpable benefits of a potential Yankee-led government; both Mexicans and Yankees condemn the stilted haughtiness and decadence of Mexican politicians (specifically Santa Anna); both Mexicans and Yankees (though admittedly fewer of the latter) openly defy the Yankee forces.

A menagerie of speech extracts, journal entries, and newspaper quotations, *Yankee Invasion* follows the plight of the lugubrious Abelardo as he attempts to write a first-hand account of the 1847 fall of Mexico City. Fifty years after the fact, Abelardo is settled and affluent; writing his account of the war is his self-proclaimed life task. From here, however, things get sticky. While any first-hand account of American imperialism is certainly intriguing enough to fill a couple hundred pages,

Solares, for whatever reason, intertwines Abelardo's riveting accounts of pre-invasion anxiety with the strangest and potentially most unwarranted subplot ever: Abelardo includes naughty extramarital things about his wife's mother in his book, and when all parties find out (as they will), the family instantly collapses into disarray.

Thus, Abelardo's "memoir" runs the gamut from the sobering hardcore of the battlefield (Abelardo stabs a few Yankees) to the risible softcore of the bedroom: while pus-oozing Yankee carcasses may revolt the squeamish, the raw awkwardness of Isabel (his former wife) and Abelardo's sexual imbroglio will leave even the most courageous readers clutching for their antiemetics. After being snubbed in years past, Solares may be a serious contender for the 2009 Bad Sex in Fiction award—a perennial honor whose ranks include the much-lauded Tom Wolfe and John Updike (recent lifetime achievement awardee), among others.

Despite the unsuccessful love story, the non-romantic portions of the novel are certainly worthwhile. Solares cogently conjoins the American conquest of physical geography with Abelardo's attempted conquest of a supernatural geography. Consorting with the outlandish charlatan Dr. Urruchúa, Abelardo dabbles in the realms of pseudo-sciences and proto-wizardry; he attempts "animal magnetism" and decodes the secret signals of the dream world; and he uses a whole slew of kooky nostrums for his pre-invasion stress—including, but not limited to, rose petal baths, permanganate enemas, and communing with the earth's magnetic fields.

In Solares's Mexico City, the end of Mexican autonomy mirrors the end of Abelardo's forays into the fantastic: once war has set in, Dr. Urruchúa, the impetus for such explorations, leaves his armchair and enters the field, mending the wounded in a grotesque frieze of the sanguinary and the somber. He dies there, a jaded and obdurate old man, and with him dies Abelardo's chances at discerning an imagined empyrean order. It is the bloody, real, Yankee imperial order that reigns supreme at the novel's end.

Yankee Invasion has much more to offer than a first-hand indictment of atrocities and war crimes. Ignacio Solares provides a nuanced meditation not only on the muddled delineation of opposition and consent (both Mexican and American), but also on the nature of the incredible and credible, the superhuman and the human. Sandwiched between two maps (one showing Mexico before the invasion; the other, after the invasion), the text is a haunting tale of a country that lost the majority of its mass, told from the perspective of an individual who has a prescient obsession with the massless and extrasensory (not to mention the extramarital). The juxtaposition of the two gives the novel its jarring resonance. ♦