



Pablo De Santis

ARGENTINA'S CANDIDATE FOR
THE HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN
AWARDS 2018

Biographical information





Personal information:

Name and surname: Pablo De Santis

Identity document: 16280856

Address: Nicolás Videla 554 (1424)
Buenos Aires, Argentina

Phone and mobile phone: (54) (11) 4431-0147

E-mail address: pablo_de_santis@hotmail.com



Biographical information

Pablo De Santis was born in Buenos Aires in 1963. When he was nineteen years old, he started working as a journalist and comic scriptwriter. In 1991 he published his first book for young people: *From the eye of the fish*. In 1992 he created, together with the designer Juan Manuel Lima the collection *La movida* (The move), a series of books aimed at adolescent readers with illustrations in the format of comics.

In the nineties, his novels *Lucas Lenz* and *The Museum of the Universe*, *The last spy*, *Encyclopaedia in the Bonfire*, *Mixed Pages* and *Carnivorous Plants* appeared. In the following decade, he wrote *The games maker*, a widely read novel, which story was followed by *The labyrinth game* and *The game of snow*. In 2014, *The games maker* was made into a film directed by Juan Pablo Buscarini with Joseph Fiennes and David Mazouz as the main characters. (<https://youtu.be/r3z5Rw2IAAn4>)

His comic *The hypnotist* (illustrated by Juan Sáenz Valiente), which was read by many young people, was also made into a television series of the Latin American HBO chain. In 2015 the first season began, and in 2017, the second one will be broadcasted. (<https://youtu.be/wq-vfvzBlbE>)

Among his novels for adult people, *The Paris enigma* (2007) is distinguished, and it was translated into 20 languages.

He has been a member in the list of honour of IBBY (International Board on Books for Young People) by his work on *The seeker of endings* (2010) and *The true business of Mr. Trapani* (2014). In addition, plenty of his books have been among the recommended ones by ALIJA (Board on Children and Young People literature in Argentina). He has also been awarded for the Konex Award as the best author of literature for young people in the decade 1994-2004 and the Planeta-Casamérica Award 2007. In 2008 he has been awarded the prize for the best novel by the **Academia Argentina de Letras** * and the National Prize for Literature 2012. Since 2016 he is a numerary member of the **Academia Argentina de Letras**.

* **Translators' note:** **Academia Argentina de Letras** is the academy in charge of studying and prescribing the use of the Spanish language in Argentina.



Photograph: Pablo de Santis





A statement on the candidate's contribution to literature for children and young people

About Pablo De Santis

By Marcelo Birmajer (1)

If there was any kind of exam which allows us to give a mark to someone as a “Writer”, my proposal would be to use three types of tests: the candidate must be able, throughout a story with a beginning, a development and an end, to: 1) make the reader laugh or feel surprised; 2) touch him emotionally or frighten him and 3) show the reader a way of perceiving the world which, he would never have felt before reading the book.

De Santis is a writer.

For thirty years, Pablo De Santis has transmitted laughter, suspense, curiosity and desire for adventure to thousands of adolescents. Plenty of his books for young people are already classics in Latin America and Spain; his books are read with pleasure by adult people as well. His novels, such as *From the eye of the fish*, *The seeker of endings* or *The Games Maker*, have taken thousands of adolescents’ first steps in the pleasure of reading; and those books are the ubiquitous reference to discuss literature when those adolescents become adults. As a short-story writer, he has published prestigious books such as *Rey Secreto* (Secret King).

Some of his short-stories (several are considered the best short-stories in Spanish American contemporary literature) seem to have been inspired by dreams, others resemble poems, but all of them are stories. That is the way a narrator shows his talent: in preserving the remains of the day and the beauty of images without losing narrative coherence. In the comic strip genre, De Santis has amazed his writers at works such as *El hipnotizador* (The hypnotist) whose narrative success as well as that of the readership, turned the comic strip into a television series, among many pages which kept the status of the present comic strip. However, De Santis’ talent goes beyond his literary works: he has also made his contribution towards the Argentinian adolescent literature as an editor. He has been the creator of the pioneering and

successful Argentinian collection of literature for young people: *La movida* (The move) (Colihue Publishing Company). Through the combination of prestigious novels and a few comic strip pages, he succeeded in drawing the attention of a massive young people readership as it had never happened before in Argentina. His ideas as an editor, as well as his books, have widely contributed to Argentinian literature. I cannot think of any other person among all the writers I know, to receive the Andersen Award.

- (1) Marcelo Birmajer is an Argentinian writer and screenwriter. He has also contributed to the national as well as international print media. His works cover different types of genre such as the short-story, the novel, the essay and the script, among others. He has been awarded prizes, mentions and scholarships. Several of his books were translated into Italian, Dutch, German and Portuguese.



List of prizes and distinctions

■ Best scriptwriter in the competition called by the *Fierro* magazine: *Fierro busca dos manos*. (Fierro seeks two hands) 1984

■ Destacados 1993 Prize (Distinguished 1993) by ALIJA (Board on children and young people literature in Argentina) for his work on *The last Spy*.

■ Finalist of the Argentinian Planeta Prize (1997) for *The translation*.

■ Platinum Konex Award (2004) as the best author of literature for young people in the decade 1994-2004

■ Planeta-Casamérica Award (2007) for *The Paris enigma*.

■ Prize for the best novel in the triennium (2008): *The Paris enigma* by the Academia Argentina de Letras.



■ *The seeker of endings* was part of the IBBY Honour list (2010) and was selected by Banco del Libro de Venezuela*

■ National Culture Award (2012) in Children's Literature category for his novel *The labyrinth game*.

■ Konex Award – Merit Diploma (2014)

■ *The true business of Mr. Trapani* was part of the IBBY Honour list (2014)

■ On August, 25 th 2016 he has been chosen numerary member of the Academia Argentina de Letras.

*Translator's note: **Banco del Libro de Venezuela** is an exchange center for used textbooks, hence the name "Banco del Libro" ("Book Bank").



Bibliography



Books for children and young people



Desde el ojo del pez

(From the eye of the fish).

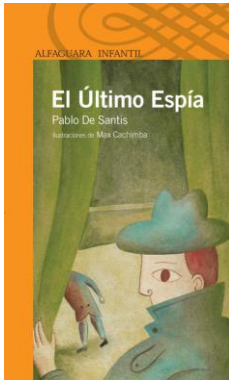
(Sudamericana, 1991)



Lucas Lenz y el Museo del Universo

(Lucas Lenz and the Museum of the Universe)

(1992, Alfaguara)



El último espía

(The last spy)

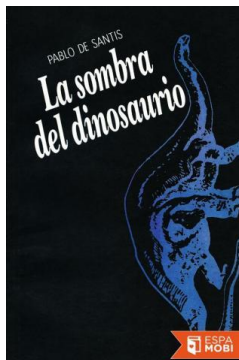
(Sudamericana, 1992)



Astronauta solo

(Lonely astronaut)

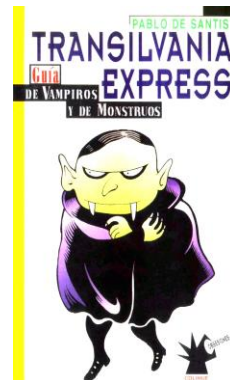
(Colihue, 1993)



La sombra del dinosaurio

(The shadow of the dinosaur)

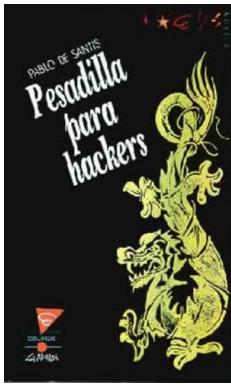
(Colihue, 1992)



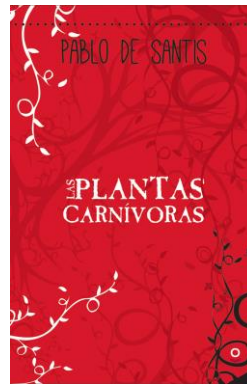
Transilvania express. Guía de vampiros y de monstruos

(Guide for vampires and Monsters)

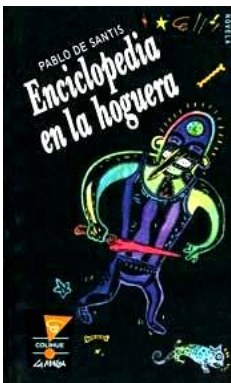
(Colihue, 1994)



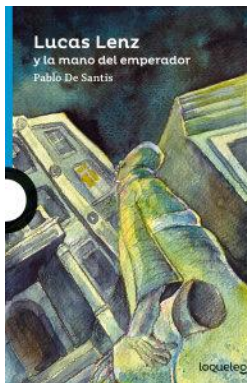
Pesadilla para hackers
(Hacker's nightmare)
(Colihue, 1992)



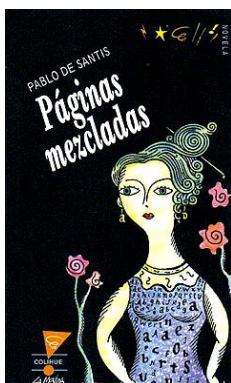
Las plantas carnívoras.
(Carnivorous plants)
(Alfaguara, 1995)



Enciclopedia en la hoguera
(Encyclopaedia in the Bonfire)
(Colihue, 1995)



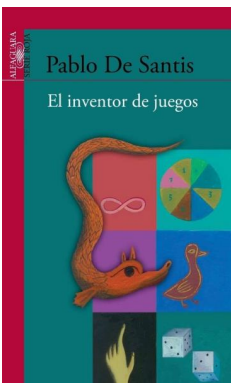
Lucas Lenz y la mano del emperador
(Lucas Lenz and the Emperor's hand)
(Norma, 2005)



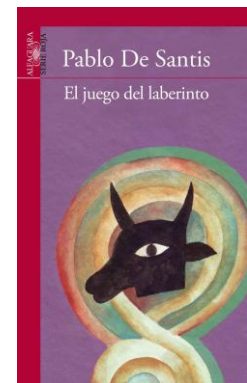
Páginas mezcladas
(Mixed pages)
(Colihue, 1997)



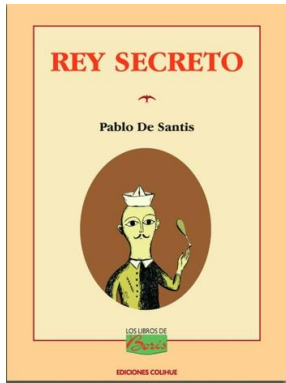
El buscador de finales
The seeker of endings
(Alfaguara, 2008)



El inventor de juegos
(The games maker)
(Alfaguara, 2003)



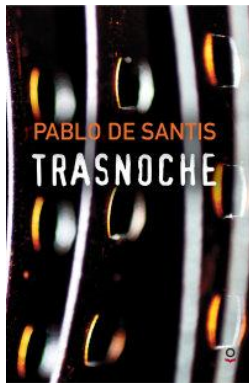
El juego del laberinto
(The labyrinth game)
(Alfaguara, 2011)



Rey secreto
(Secret king)
(Colihue, 2005)



El verdadero negocio del Señor Trapani
(The true business of Mr. Trapani)
(Capital Intelectual, 2012)



Trasnoche
(Late Night)
(Alfaguara, 2014)



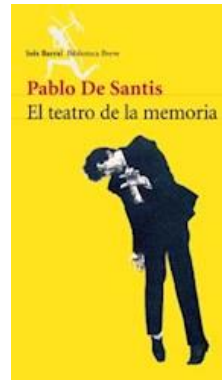
El juego de la nieve
(The game of snow)
(Loqueleo, 2016)



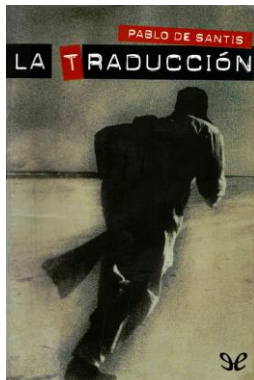
Novels for adults



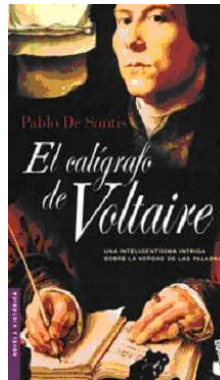
Palacio de la noche
(Palace of the night)
(De la Flor, 1987)



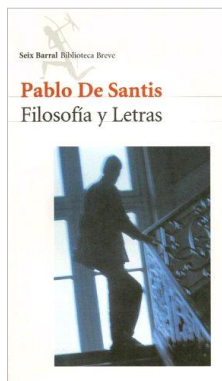
El teatro de la memoria
(Theatre of Memory)
(Destino, 2000)



La traducción
(The translation)
(Planeta, 1997)



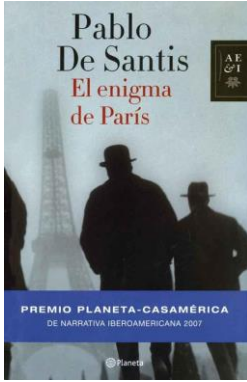
El calígrafo de Voltaire
(Voltaire's Calligrapher)
(Seix Barral, 2001)



Filosofía y Letras
(Philosophy and Literature)
(Destino, 1998)



Sexta lámpara
(The sixth lamp)
(Destino, 2005)

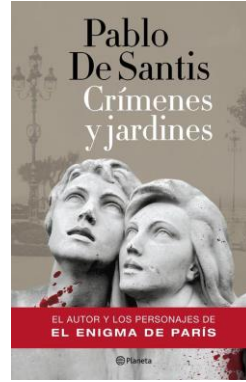


El enigma de París

(The Paris enigma)

(Planeta, 2007)

Winner of the Planeta-Casamérica Award.



Crímenes y jardines

(Crimes and gardens)

(Planeta, 2013)



Los anticuarios

(The Antique dealers)

(Planeta, 2010)



Translations (Books for children and young people)

Brazil

- *inventor de jogos (The games maker) (Girafinha, San Pablo, 2008. Translated by Rafael Mantovani)*

Italy

(All of them translated by Elena Rolla):

- *L'inventore di giochi (The games maker) (Salani, Milán, 2006)*
- *Lucas Lenz e il museo dell'universo (Lucas Lenz and the Museum of the Universe) (EDT, Torino, 2008)*
- *L'ultima spia (The last spy) (Nuove Edizioni Romane, Roma, 2009)*
- *Il giallo delle pagine mischiate (Mixed pages) (Nuove Edizioni Romane, Roma, 2009; Parapiglia, Roma, 2016)*
- *Lucas Lenz e la mano dell'imperatore (Lucas Lenz and the Emperor's hand*
(EDT, Torino, 2009)
- *L'ombra del dinosauro (The shadow of the dinosaur) (Nuove Edizioni Romane, Roma, 2010)*
- *Il ragazzo chi scrisse l'enciclopedia de se stesso (Encyclopaedia in the Bonfire) (Salani, Milán, 2011)*

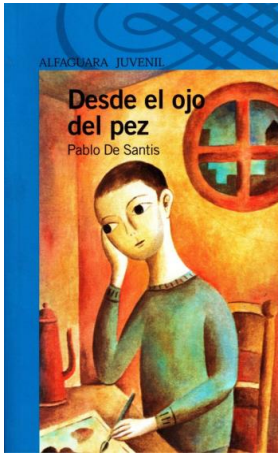


Five of the most important titles by the candidate (even if out of print)

- *Lucas Lenz y el Museo del Universo*
(Lucas Lenz and the Museum of the Universe). (1992)
- *El inventor de juegos* (The games maker). (2003)
- *El buscador de finales* (The seeker of endings). (2008)
- *Trasnoche* (Late Night). (2014)
- *El juego de la nieve* (The snow game). (2017)



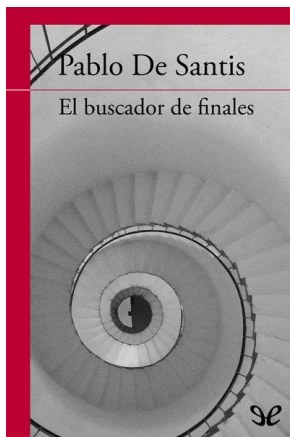
List of the books sent to the jurors



*From the
eye
of the fish*



*The True
Business
of Mr.
Trapani*



*The
endings
seeker*



Late Night



*The Games
Maker*

Appreciative essays,
interviews or articles



Interview to Pablo De Santis

“Imagination fits better to uncertain moments of the reader’s life”

By Isabel Garcia Cintas
Buenos Aires

With intelligence and attraction, the comics, novels and detective stories of the Argentinian writer, challenge logic and reason beyond limits.



Photograph By Ivana Costa

The creative aspects in the literary production of Pablo De Santis are represented by a long list of titles. He has been a journalist, comic scriptwriter creator and editor; writer of works praised by critics and of a series of novels for adults and adolescents. He has written texts and scripts for programmes and

a television miniseries. He is head of Enedé, an illustrated narrative collection which publishes classics of the Argentinian comics and two collections of literature for adolescents, *Obsesiones*

(Obsessions) and *La movida* (The move). His works have been translated into ten languages and he has been awarded, among others, the Planeta-Casa de América Award in 2007. He was the finalist for the Planeta Award in 1997.

He lives in Buenos Aires, in the neighborhood called Caballito where he was born, but this year he returns as a guest author to the Miami Book Fair.

De Santis replied honestly and kindly to all our questions about mythology of the detective genre, in which he is an expert on weaving subtle imaginative plots.

Your beginning as a writer was settled by the creation of comics. What are the most interesting memories you have from your first steps in the magazine: “*Fierro*”?

I have always written stories, since I was twelve years old, but the first work I could publish was the script *Ataúdes sobre mi cabeza* (Coffins over my head), which won the comic strip Prize of the magazine “*Fierro*”. I was twenty one years old and it was a great excitement to be able to win that competition. Comics have helped me above all, to think about the visual aspect of fiction, even when it does not deal with comics, but with novels. And the visual aspect of comics is tightly related to the memory of the reader. Since “*Fierro*” I have met writers such as Ricardo Piglia, Juan Sasturain or the Uruguayan Mario Levrero, who were very generous to me. The editing office of *Fierro* was very small, but it was a continuous parade of people. There were visitors all the time, important names of our comics, such as Carlos Trillo, Ricardo Barreiro or Carlos Nine, as well as eccentric people. I remember a man who stayed a long time, when I already was editor-in-chief, to tell me that he had been a ninja warrior, but had quitted, because ninjas represented the dark side of martial arts.

What is the connection between those works with Max Cachimba in “*Fierro*”, and the novels for adolescents that followed? Was it easy to move from the comics to the language of the novel?

Many years went by, I feel far away from those scripts, but I still admire the work of Max Cachimba. In two opportunities I chose characters from my comics and turned them into books for adolescents: for example: *The last spy*, with Max Cachimba, and then with *Lucas Lenz y el Museo del Universo* (Lucas Lenz and The Museum of the Universe), with illustrations by Daniel Rabanal. But before that I was determined to write novels and kept several of them, which happily remained unpublished. The first novel I published was *El palacio de la noche* (Palace of the night), published by Ediciones de la Flor in 1987.

Comics have made me especially consider the visual aspect of fiction, even when it is about novels, but not comics. And the visual aspect of comics is closely related to the memory of the reader. What do we remember from the novels we have read? Images remain in our minds more than words.

I do not remember a single phrase from *Crimen y Castigo* (Crime and punishment). But I still have the image in my mind of Raskólnikov sewing the hobble inside his coat to carry the ax.

Your production of books and stories for young people is vast and it has been successful in different areas. The Games Maker was made into a film last year with veteran actors, such as Ed Asner and Joseph Fiennes. To what extent did you take part in the production of the film? Were you satisfied with the final result?

I loved the film and I was delighted with its visual aspect. For years I watched the director, Juan Pablo Buscarini, working hard to make the production of this film. Literature is similar to dreams: it always deals with reality, but through symbols or enigmas. It is surely one of the most ambitious films in the history of the Argentinian film industry. At the beginning I took part in the script, but through years, there were several versions and the final script was the one of the director's.

As far as I know, your novel The translation, was written for adult people and it was finally published for adolescents. Could you explain about it? What do you do to draw the attention indistinctly of every generation?

La Traducción (The Translation) is a short novel that takes place in an imaginary beach in the Argentinian coast. There is a translator's Congress which is touched by a mysterious death. The novel starts as a detective story, but then it leans towards fantastic literature. Although it is a novel that has certain degree of difficulty for non-expert readers, it deals with translation, with artificial languages, with Nietzsche and with some other things; adolescents were so interested in it, that an edition for schools was published. But the first publications as well as the translations into several languages were aimed at adult readers.

At the moment of writing, do you have a certain reader in mind, of a certain age?

I feel that as a reader, I didn't change a lot since I was twelve years old. Although my knowledge is wider than when I was twelve, I still like the same things. In my books,

there isn't any generational reference and I try not to mention any hints to present things. Imagination fits better to uncertain moments of the reader's life. My novels are furnished with broken-down chairs, old wardrobes, spotted mirrors.

In your long career as a writer, your works are not a reflection of your commitment to the immediate reality, but they are in favour of the symbolic, the enigmas and the search for the solution of mysteries...

I have always liked genres such as fantastic literature, science fiction, crime fiction. That made me distance from realism. When I started publishing –in the mid-eighties– there was a kind of command to consider themes related to the military dictatorship, and I felt somewhat distant from that intention. There is always a dynamic between reason and absurd in detective novels. I lived very intensively the time of the Falklands war, because by that time, during my compulsory military service, my comrades had to go to the battlefield. But, I could not find the way to write anything about it. Long time went by until I could write a story about this topic, *Clase 63* (Class of 1963) which is part of the book *Late night*. However, I think literature is like dreams: it always deals with the real, but as a symbol or enigma.

Why did you start writing detective novels?

I grew up in a house where there were many Agatha Christie, Simenon, Erle Stanley Gardner novels. There is something deeply attractive in the secret: ignoring something, but knowing at the same time that the truth will be revealed, that it is somewhere, slightly hidden. However, in my novels, especially in *El enigma de París* (The Paris enigma) and *Crímenes y Jardines* (Crimes and gardens), I work a lot with mythology of the genre, especially with the detective figure, which, in spite of its crystallizations, or perhaps because of that, I continue feeling fascinated. Another problem that arises in Swedish novels is the presence of serious sexual murderers committed to women while they want to convince us that it is to become us aware of violence against women.

There is always a dynamic between reason and absurd in detective novels. Dupin, Poe's detective and Sherlock Holmes are smart investigators, but in their personal life, they are a disaster, they behave as if they were crazy people. When do ordinary people act as if they were detectives, following clues and speculations? In the moment they feel jealous. This means, they use logical deduction when they are less rational.

There is a massive production of films and television series in which the solution of a crime is sought, which is the difference or parallelism that you find between present detective stories and that vast production of series and films?

There are two things that dominate series and films. One of them is to overvalue scientific elements, in detriment to the construction of the characters and implicit romanticism of the figure of the detective. The other one is the abuse in the figure of the psychopath. It is considered that the spectator has his sensibility blunt; therefore, they need bloodier, more cruel, more sadistic crimes. Nothing seems to be enough. This can also be seen in many detective novels.

Another problem that arises in Swedish novels irritates me:

They include a social topic, so that the reader feels entertained, but at the same time he feels he is doing something in favour of humanity. In general, the politically correct matter is matched with sadism: serious sexual murderers are committed to women but they pretend us to think that it is to become us aware of violence against them. I prefer the books of PD James, full of intelligence and charm, safe from all the politically correct issue.

There was an opportunity in which you spoke about the absolute freedom of the author and you said something like: “the poetics of freedom were the origin of the worst excesses of surrealism while the poetics of constriction brought about the most important authors of the XX century”. Could you explain this?

I was surely thinking about Borges, Ítalo Calvino, Nabokov, and Truman Capote. They are writers who, far from writing the first thing that comes to their mind, write deliberately and patiently their work. The work is done with logic, with the poor sense of logic that one may have, but underneath there is the unconscious that constantly installs things which does not seem to fit anywhere ...until they do. Perhaps I was also thinking about the Poe’s Theory of the short story who argued that the writer of a short story must have a trend from the first line to the construction of a final effect. Poe developed his intellectually refined poetic in an article devoted to Hawthorne and in

Philosophy of the composition. Borges liked to recall that the most romantic author was the creator of a doctrine which denies any surrealist romantic writing.

Which is your experience in the creative process, when some isolated ideas at the beginning of that process finally reach an aesthetics that can be read by others? What does a writer really work on to shape his work?

They are, as you say, isolated ideas: islands which have to be joined in an archipelago. Little by little coincidences are being seen and what seems an accumulation of casual inventions takes shape. The elements of fiction start to “rime”, matches appear. Authors work with logic, with the sense of logic that one may have, but beneath, the unconscious is constantly incorporating things which do not seem to fit anywhere ...but then they fit. Writing –especially novel writing- is similar to children’s games, where the most incongruent objects are finally incorporated and make sense.

Late Night, a selection of short stories is your last publication. Are you preparing your next book? If so, will it be a novel, or another selection of short stories?

I have been working on a novel for more than ten years. It is the longest book I have ever written and it has been changing its shape through the years. But the most immediate one is the third and last part of the cycle that started with *El inventor de juegos* (The games maker) followed by *El juego del laberinto* (The labyrinth game). It will be called *El juego de la nieve* (The game of snow) and will be published in a few months.

Reproductions of book covers and illustrations





El Hipnotizador (The hypnotist)(2010) with the cartoonist Juan Sáenz Valiente



Inventor de jogos
(The games maker)

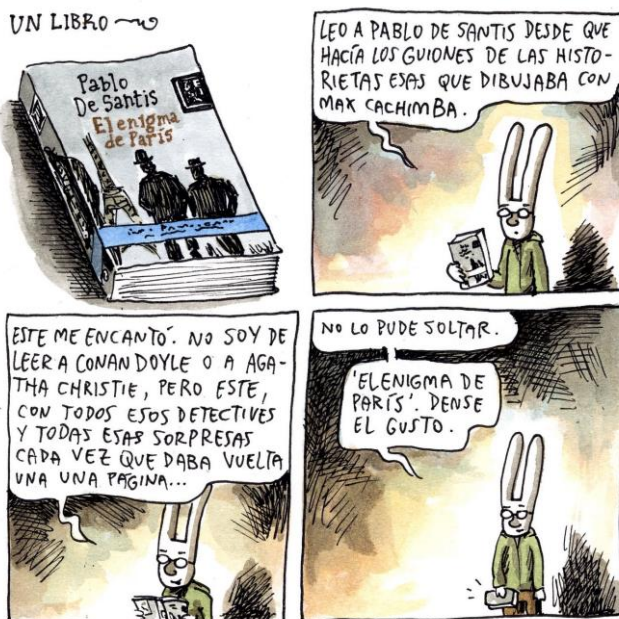
Girafinha, San Pablo, 2008.

Translated by
Rafael Mantovani

El enigma de París
(The Paris enigma).

Japanese publishing house Tor

Translation of Maki Miyazaki



Argentine cartoonist
Liniers recommends
Pablo De Santis.



Pablo De Santis
Writer Award nominee
Hans Christian Andersen

Coordinación general: Cecilia Repetti

Traducción: Alicia Goldin - Claudia Villareal
Diseño del dossier: Guillermina Marino