

**The Metafictional Vampires of Buenos Aires: A Study of *Los anticuarios* by Pablo De Santis**

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Originating in the folklore of Southeastern Europe, vampires have made their way around the world as subjects of literature, most famously in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Today vampire fiction abounds both in written and film form, especially in North America where phenomena such as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and the *Twilight* saga have encountered great success in the realm of popular culture. The further south one goes in the Americas, however, the fewer vampires one is likely to encounter in fiction. At the southernmost tip of the Southern Cone, in Pablo De Santis's native Argentina, vampires appear to be almost completely absent as literary characters. In a book review of an anthology of vampire fiction published in Argentina in 2002, De Santis notes the absence of Argentine stories in the anthology, stating that "a pesar de nuestra gran tradición fantástica, en Argentina los vampiros han estado ausentes casi por completo. Bioy Casares se asomó tímidamente al tema en *Aventuras de un fotógrafo en La Plata* y Alberto Laiseca acaba de publicar una novela donde reescribe la historia de Drácula" ("Eterno deleite" s/n). One would have to add Griselda Gambaro's short story "Nosferatu," her theater play bearing the same name, Cortázar's early short story "El hijo del vampiro," and his posthumous graphic novel *Fantomas contra los vampiros multinacionales* to the list, but it is not hard to agree with De Santis on the overall absence of Argentine vampires from the literary scene. In 2010, De Santis himself fills this gap by publishing *Los anticuarios*, a novel in which he takes elements of the vampire myth and adapts them to create an Argentine brand of vampire known as an *anticuario*. *Anticuarios* suffer from a condition of the blood, a sort of illness, which causes

them to feel extreme discomfort when faced with sunlight. The same illness also causes them to thirst for the blood of humans, and enables them to create the illusion in others of seeing a departed loved one when in the presence of an *anticuario*. Although they are not “undead” like their European and North American counterparts, *anticuarios* cannot die of natural causes. Like vampires, they live for centuries until they die a violent death at the hands of somebody else. In this study, the author examines the *anticuarios* as metafictional characters whose attributes and actions serve as metaphors that reflect upon acts of reading and writing literature, linking those acts to the primordial thirst for blood experienced by the *anticuarios*, as well as to the erotic element associated with that thirst.

The novel is set in Buenos Aires during the 1950's and is narrated by Santiago Lebrón in the form of a memoir. Lebrón begins his career as a typewriter repairman at a newspaper office, but is soon promoted to the job of journalist in charge of the newspaper's section on the occult. Although Lebrón does not believe in the occult, his job requires that he attend a conference at an abandoned hotel where a group of scholars is rumored to reveal a real *anticuario*. The leader of the scholarly group is Professor Balacco, who is accompanied by his protégé and future son-in-law, Montiel. Also present is Balacco's daughter and Montiel's fiancé, Luisa, with whom Lebrón falls desperately in love. Lebrón's skepticism quickly disappears when he walks into a hotel room and encounters the likeness of his childhood friend, Marcial, who had committed suicide years earlier. After much commotion during the night, Montiel kills the *anticuario*, and Lebrón is forever involved in a crime committed without his approval. Following the label on a book that belonged to the murder victim, Lebrón finds a used bookstore and meets Calisser, the bookstore's owner and himself an *anticuario*. When Lebrón suffers a deadly attack that requires

an immediate blood transfusion, it is Calisser who saves his life by giving him a transfusion of Calisser's own blood, and forever infecting Lebrón with the curse of the *anticuarios*.

Long before introducing the *anticuarios*' mysterious ailment, De Santis establishes an interconnection between books, blood, and an attraction to the opposite sex. At the opening of the novel, the narrator recalls an episode from his youth in which he was attracted to a new girl at school, but was unable to impress her with his speech because, as his first metafictional reflection notes, "el mundo de las palabras era torpe e insuficiente" (11). He therefore chooses action over speech and throws a rock at a bird. Missing the bird, he hits the schoolhouse window, and the nameless girl picks up one of the shards, cutting herself in the process. Santiago is petrified and unable to react, "sólo miraba la gota de sangre en la mano de la niña, que parecía ofrecerla como algo que se ha traído de muy lejos y con enormes cuidados" (12). Although they are children playing in a playground, the sexual undertones are obvious: the female's skin has been broken by a sharp object, made sharp by the action of the male character, and the female now appears to be offering the fluid produced by this breakage for seeming consumption by the male. All he can do, however, is stare in silence until a voice calls his name and sends him to the town library as punishment. Consequently, Lebrón's first pseudo-sexual experience leads to a discovery of books. It is significant that Santiago's initiation in books, blood, and sexuality should occur on the same day and be prompted by the same event. The three are intertwined and inseparable in the novel, each becoming a figurative representation of the other in a complex metafictional metaphor where reading and writing become associated with the sexual encounter, which, in turn, is represented by the vampire act of piercing the skin in order to consume the blood.

Lebrón explains the connection between the primordial thirst for blood and sexual instinct, stating that according to older *anticuarios*, “con el tiempo hay una separación entre los instintos sexuales y la sed primordial; pero a mí no me tocaba todavía vivirla” (176). Although with time the sexuality associated with blood drinking may decrease, for young *anticuarios* such as Lebrón, the connection is strong and difficult, if not impossible, to control. Nursel Icoz points out that “the vampire myth may be considered as the highest symbolic representation of eroticism” (214), going on to examine the erotic undertones in specific examples from Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*. The undead vampire of European legends that inspired Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is portrayed as sexually aggressive and hurtful to his victims to the point of sadism. While the same aggression is present in *Los anticuarios*, the aggressor is quite unwilling and afraid to cause harm to his victim, going to great difficulty in order to control the primordial urges. De Santis’s *anticuarios* function as a civilized society, and, rather than taking pleasure in devouring other bodies, they are fully aware of the danger they can cause to their victims and have made a pact to control their thirst and avoid sexual encounters in order to protect their potential victims. Those who resort to the “old methods” are issued a death warrant and executed by one of their own, an *anticuario* known as el Numismático.

In order to avoid the uncontrollable urge caused by the thirst for human blood, *anticuarios* drink an elixir, which, too, has a metafictional significance. Lebrón describes his first experience with the elixir as follows:

La agité apenas y bebí unas gotas. Me recordó a algún sabor de la infancia. Era dulce y amargo a la vez. Apenas la probé supe que aquello era . . . el secreto por el cual los anticuarios habían podido evitar los efectos de la sed primordial. Unos segundos antes me sentía liberado de la sed. Era suficiente para mí, pero no me

dejé engañar: aquello era apenas reflejo y copia de un original perdido. . . . En ese entonces yo llamaba la botellita <<Béeme>>, recordando las Aventuras de Alicia; fue más adelante cuando descubrí que los anticuarios la llamaban el elixir. (134-35)

Lebrón's original name for the elixir makes an intertextual reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*. The comparison is significant on several levels. On a metafictional level, it serves to remind readers of the textuality of the novel in front of them and the "reality," it seeks to represent. Patricia Waugh explains that "one way of reinforcing the notion of literary fiction as an alternative world is the use of literary and mythical allusion which reminds the reader of the existence of this world outside everyday time and space, of its thoroughgoing textuality *and* intertextuality" (112). On the intertextual level, the elixir is much like a text, which can imitate but not replace reality. On a figurative level, the comparison to Carroll's novel suggests the fact that by becoming an *anticuario*, Lebrón has experienced a metaphorical fall similar to Alice's physical fall through the rabbit hole. Following the fall, he now suffers the "primordial thirst" that only the elixir can eliminate. The elixir, however, only imitates the blood for which *anticuarios* thirst, and drinking it cannot fully satisfy the fundamental thirst for human blood, representative also of the thirst for the uncontrollable thirst for the sexual encounter.

Lebrón soon experiences another fall when he tastes human blood and returns to the "old methods" for a time. Lebrón separates himself from the other *anticuarios* for what appear to be moral reasons, following the murder of his rival, Montiel. Lebrón has unwittingly sentenced Montiel to death by informing the *anticuarios* that it was Montiel who pulled the trigger on the initial murder victim at the abandoned hotel. During Montiel's murder, the usually non-violent *anticuarios* drug Montiel's new bride and Lebrón's love obsession, Luisa, and present her body

to Lebrón to do with as he wishes. Calisser hands Lebrón a golden pin with a ruby tip and leaves him alone with Luisa in order to teach him a lesson “sobre usted” (156). The lesson he learns is the satisfaction that comes from having the original rather than a copy:

El elixir era apenas la copia; la sangre, en cambio, estaba despojada de toda irrealidad, tenía el gusto de las cosas que han estado allí desde siempre. . . . Temí que eso que había en mí, y que era más nuevo y a la vez mucho más antiguo que yo, llegara a devorarla. Hubiera podido hacerlo; descubrí en mi hambre una perfección, un ansia de totalidad que nunca había encontrado en mi vida. (156-57)

The fictional elixir has been replaced by true blood, and Lebrón loses control, piercing Luisa’s body numerous times with the golden pin, in spite of his fear of hurting her. Although he performs terrible acts of violence on Luisa’s body, Lebrón does so with a certain degree of care, making sure he does not “devour” Luisa and cause her to lose her life. When he wakes up the next morning only to discover that he was being used in order to keep Luisa away from Montiel during his murder, Lebrón abandons the *anticuarios*. He begins to feed on human blood, usually that of prostitutes, on a regular basis, becoming much more aggressive and Dracula-like in his violence to women. Icoz claims that in the case of *Dracula*, the “novel’s terror springs from inside the human mind. Those repressed desires and fears recognized as being unacceptable and therefore unacknowledged to oneself are metamorphosed into visions of frightful beings” (217). Lebrón, too, begins to feed on those repressed desires, of which he is afraid. He devours many helpless women, promising himself every morning that it will not happen again, only to be overcome by thirst and turn into the horrific vampires of legend and fiction.

On a metafictional level, the nightly encounters represent both the act of writing and the act of reading. If the elixir can be seen as a textual representation of reality, those who consume

it can represent passive recipients, or passive readers. Upon consuming true blood and marking up the victim's body, the *anticuario* also becomes a writer, one who controls the text and can therefore "create" reality, as well as an active reader, one who participates in the writing process through analysis. The victim's blood is the metaphorical ink, and Lebrón's golden pin becomes his metaphorical pen. The skin is the parchment, and the act of penetrating the victim's skin and shedding her blood during the sexual-like encounter becomes representative of the act of writing. On the night of his first encounter with Luisa, the writing process produces the following results: "la piel pálida, las huellas de sangre reseca en el cuello, en los pechos, en la cara, en los muslos. . . había manchas, sobras del festín; empecé a limpiar el cuerpo con el pañuelo bordado, que fue tiñéndose de rojo" (158). The handkerchief can be compared to blotting paper, as it absorbs the excess ink used by the author in the creation of his manuscript. During the "writing process," however, the blotting paper is the writer's own tongue as he consumes the red liquid, which flows out of the victim's body. The consumption of the blood following the writing process can also be seen as a representation of active reading. Lebrón "reads" the page he has written, absorbing and assimilating that which he wrote. The need for reading, then, along with that for writing, can also be compared to the primordial thirst of the *anticuario*.

De Santis also creates a character by the name of Nicolás Granier, an *anticuario* through whom the connection between blood and ink is made explicit:

Sabía distinguir las tintas por su sabor. Esta habilidad se convirtió en obsesión y se pasaba las tardes abriendo sus tinteros y dejando caer una gota de tinta negra de Ceylán o de una portuguesa, de color verde, que fabricaban en Sintra sobre su lengua. Calisser me contó que de tanto probar tintas se intoxicó y estuvo a punto de morir.

-Es increíble--decía Granier cuando recordaba el episodio--pero yo, al revés de la gente normal, prefiero la tinta a la sangre. (148-49)

The primordial thirst for blood in Granier is not as strong as his thirst for ink. Ink, therefore, becomes equivalent to blood in its ability to satiate the thirst of at least one *anticuario*. It is important to point out, however, that the consumption of such ink can be deadly to the author who uses his tongue to blot the ink made for writing rather than blood, which, by association, becomes a truer form of ink, one which gives life rather than causing death, at least for the one consuming it.

While most of the bodies mutilated by Lebrón belong to unwilling victims who need to be sedated prior to the sexually charged blood feast, there is one woman who offers herself freely as a canvas for Lebrón to write on. Celina Ortiz is the one who discovers Lebrón's secret and insists that he do with her what he does by force with the other women, but without the sedative. The two eventually begin to live together, sleeping during the day and walking the streets of Buenos Aires at night prior to the nightly blood ritual: "después de las caminatas me pedía que bebiera, como si se tratara de un reclamo, y yo practicaba en su cuello, en sus muslos, en su espalda, los pinchazos y a veces los cortes, en un pacto de sangre que necesitaba ser renovado una y otra vez" (191). The victim here is not only willing, she demands to be cut and participates actively and with pleasure in the writing/sexual/blood feeding process. In the blood pact, which serves as Lebrón's metaphor of the process, Celina's body becomes the paper, literally signed in her own blood by Lebrón's violent penetration of her skin.

Unfortunately, Celina is also the one who proves to Lebrón that Calisser's warning "que el amor llevaba a la muerte, que la sed, acentuada por la pasión, bebía hasta la última gota de vida" (192). With every signing of the pact, Celina becomes weaker and weaker, losing weight



and color daily. At her insistence, Lebrón attempts to give her his own blood with a syringe and thus turn her into an *anticuaria*: “Ávida, Celina me pedía más de mi sangre. Como si fuera un veneno, la hundía más en su anemia. Estaba tan pálida, tan demarcada que no podía sacarla fuera de la pensión” (193). While consuming Celina’s blood gives Lebrón strength, her consumption of his blood becomes a poison to her, demonstrating that it is a one-way process--only Lebrón can be the recipient in this relationship. That is not always the case as, in order to become infected and turn into an *anticuario*, Lebrón had to become the recipient of Calisser’s blood. The mystery is unresolved. Perhaps Lebrón is unaware of the ritual he needs to perform, or perhaps only certain individuals are able to be *anticuarios*. Eventually Celina commits suicide, not because of the prospect of dying of consumption, but rather because Lebrón threatens to put a stop to the blood exchange and nightly feedings. She is the victim who cannot bear to live without the violent interchange, without the marking of her body by Lebrón, and without receiving his blood into her veins. She has, in a way, become an *anticuaria* who suffers the primordial thirst for Lebrón’s blood, but who cannot bear the ingestion of that blood without being poisoned.

Celina’s job as a transcriber for a group of lawyers is also significant, as it gives her a personal connection to writing, most specifically to the typewriter as a writing instrument. When Lebrón meets Celina for one of their first official dates, she comes to him with her fingers covered in typewriter ink, cursing her job: “Malditas máquinas. Todo el día golpeando esas teclas. Es un trabajo infernal” (190). The verb “golpeando” suggests a violent action on Celina’s part, as she brutally hits the keys in order to allow the ink to penetrate the page in the typewriter. The ink stain on her hands resembles a bloodstain on a perpetrator following an act of violence.

Lebrón first introduces violence to typewriters when he describes their fate in the newspaper office where he works:

los dedos de los redactores eran pesados, y las máquinas debían soportar sus arrepenimientos y cambios de humor, que se manifestaban en forma de bruscos golpes del carro o puñetazos contra el teclado. A lo largo de la jornada, distintas clases de emociones atravesaban la redacción y todas terminaban dejando alguna huella en las máquinas. (20)

It is Lebrón's initial job to heal typewriters from the abuses of the paper editors. He is a healer of those machines, gently fixing them so that they can continue to function as writing instruments: "me ocupaba de quitar la mezcla de pulpa y tinta que borraba los contornos de las letras; engrasaba los mecanismos, ajustaba tuercas y tornillos, y reemplazaba los diminutos resortes" (20). In a way, he and Celina experience a role reversal when she becomes the recipient, albeit willing, of the violence initiated by Lebrón.

The typewriter, then, can be viewed as a double metaphor. It can represent the victims like Luisa, Celina, and the countless nameless street women attacked by Lebrón, whose bodies are bruised and pierced in order to produce the fluid that can satisfy the primordial thirst of the *anticuario*. While the thirst is satiated with blood ingestion, the abuse of the typewriter serves to produce a text, whose production can be a violent process. Simultaneously, the typewriter can be an instrument of violence, as it pierces the paper with its keys, driven by the typist. In this case, the typewriter can be seen as representative of those *anticuarios* who, like Lebrón, give in to the primordial thirst and allow their text to be written on the bodies of their victims.

On yet another level, Celina's connection with stenography and typing, and her subsequent transformation into Lebrón's eager and willing victim, mirror the transformation of

another famous character from a vampire novel, that of Mina in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. Erik Butler provides a detailed analysis of the connection between Mina's writing endeavors and her transformation into a quasi-vampire:

Mina means only to assist Harker, but her stenography and typewriting deform her. To the extent that she devotes herself to clerical work, Mina invades Harker's space, even if she does not mean to do so. Her side interests go hand in hand with a hunger for information in all its forms. . . . As a result of an "unnatural" level of nosiness not restricted to the womanly sphere of gossip and intrigue, she peeks into Harker's "foreign journal" without his permission. What Mina finds shocks her and, in imitation of the "lady journalists" she resolves to "get [her] typewriter this very hour and begin transcribing." She thereby not only discovers that her husband has encountered a vampire, but practically becomes one herself. . . . Parallel to the text that passes through her hands, animal magnetism courses through her body and soul; supernatural connections double material ones. (115)

Celina is drawn to Lebrón through a similar "animal magnetism," which makes her follow him and observe his adventures prior to approaching him and asking to become a part of those adventures. Mina is not a "real" vampire, but behaves like one, especially in the episode where she is discovered drinking Dracula's blood. Similarly, Celina becomes a quasi-*anticuaria* by demanding and receiving Lebrón's blood in the infusions. Unlike Mina, however, Celina abandons her typewriter and suffers a full transformation into one. Her body becomes the instrument of recording text, and her author becomes the former typewriter repairman, Lebrón himself.

Although Lebrón is the perpetrator of the violent actions that mutilate his victims' bodies as he engages in the metaphorical writing process, we need to remember that *anticuarios*, like vampires, can be victims of violence as well. Elizabeth McCarthy speaks of the vampire as a victim of mutilation, referring to the traditional staking of the vampire in order to kill him/her. According to McCarthy,

the central action and primal scene of the vampire myth is not the vampire's consuming of blood but its own destruction and mutilation. Far more the victim of atrocious acts of bodily violation than the perpetrator, the vampire body is a primary site for exploring the methods and reasons behind the excessively violent and ritualistic use of another's body as a means of articulating social, as well as individual, beliefs, fears and desires. (189)

Although the *anticuarios* are not the traditional undead vampires of European fiction, they too, become targets of violence, and consequently undergo a transformation from writer to text, when their own bodies are mutilated through that violence. When the Numismático approaches Lebrón to warn him that he is in danger and should return to the elixir, he issues the following warning:

Si le sirve de consuelo, le diré que no es algo que me haga feliz. Pero son tantos sus errores que no hará falta que le haga una visita; bastará con los campesinos con antorchas. . . . Yo los llamo así, porque soy aficionado al cinematógrafo. Hablo de los hombres comunes, los hombres del montón. . . . Siempre hay un momento en que los campesinos con antorchas se exaltan y rodean el castillo. Cuídese de los campesinos con antorchas. (181)

The torch-bearing peasants represent the masses, those who fear the unknown and seek to destroy it, even if it poses no threat to them. Significantly, it is precisely such an attack that turns Lebrón into an *anticuario*. Early in the book, Lebrón tells Calisser to warn the *anticuarios* of a trap set for them by Balacco and Farías. Farías, an insane policeman who is obsessed with *anticuarios*, ties Lebrón to a “máquina del destino,” a sort of dentist’s drill that he uses to change the lifeline on Lebrón’s hand: “tenemos que reforzar la línea de la vida, para asegurarnos su largo porvenir” (112). As he tries to write on Lebrón’s body, Farías cuts a vein, leaving Lebrón almost dead. In a way, Farías does extend Lebrón’s life by writing on him with the drill. The writing process leaves Lebrón indefinitely alive, until an act of violence ends him. In the end, all the *anticuarios* except for Lebrón die as a result of such violence, and Lebrón withdraws from society, the lone *anticuario* awaiting the day when the elixir will end, and the primordial thirst will drive him out to the streets where he will hunt for human flesh and blood “hasta que me iluminen las antorchas” (266). The day that happens is the day the *anticuario*’s own body becomes the parchment for a new text, the one that ends the metaphorical book of his life.

The book metaphor is recurrent and has several functions in *Los anticuarios*. When Lebrón first begins reading, he makes the following observation:

Lo que al principio me llamó la atención fue que hubiera muchos libros con páginas sin guillotinar. No se me ocurrió que uno mismo debía cortar las páginas, yo pensaba que esos libros ya eran así, que era ley sagrada leerlos con dificultad, como quién espía. Libros destinados a guardar un secreto. (13)

In order to discover the secret meaning of books, one has to apply violence, cut open their pages as Lebrón later cuts open the bodies of his victims. Books, then, are objects whose significance can only be discovered by the active reader, the one who is not afraid to

metaphorically “cut” into the book and search out its meaning. At the same time, books can be dangerous. Just as a typewriter can both receive the violent hits of the typist and simultaneously hit the paper and stain it with ink, so books can receive violence while at the same time serving as weapons of such violence. In a recurring dream, prior to tasting the elixir that will at least mitigate his thirst, Lebrón has the following experience:

La chica dormía y yo me acercaba con un libro en las manos, blandiéndolo como un arma; en silencio hacía cortes en el cuerpo de la durmiente, usando las páginas de ese mismo libro, tan afiladas en el sueño que bastaba acercarlas levemente a la piel para que dejaran un rastro rojo. Arrancaba una página, la hería, y pasaba a la siguiente, como si la página hubiera perdido el filo en la operación. En los sueños, los libros nunca sirven para leer. (134)

Once again, books, blood, and a quasi-sexual encounter appear interconnected. Each serves as a metaphorical representation of the other. From a Freudian perspective, the book in this dream is the instrument of penetration and therefore becomes a phallic symbol. The penetration of the book into the body produces blood. Blood, especially in vampire fiction, represents life (hence the need of the undead to feed on that which they do not possess). In the metaphor from Lebrón’s dream, what brings out the life-fluid is the act of reading. On the other hand, too much blood loss can cause death. Reading, then, can be seen as a source of both life and death, and is driven by the same uncontrollable desire known to *anticuarios* as “la sed primordial.”

Perhaps the power of the book comes from its contents, the secret message buried inside the covers to be deciphered by the alert reader. Throughout the ages, literature has been known to influence history through the ideas it can carry in its message. Throughout *Los anticuarios* books

also appear to hold the key to destiny. Calisser, for example, explains to Lebrón the importance of detective fiction in knowing one's destiny:

No podemos vivir creyendo que todo es azar. Tenemos que encontrar la idea de un orden, de un destino; si no, estamos perdidos. Las novelas policiales nos ponen alerta sobre esas señales, nos dicen que abramos los ojos. . . . Hay más. En las novelas policiales todo es conspiración, conjura, secreto. Todas las cosas terminan por encajar, por tener un sentido. ¿No ha visto cómo, dispersos por ahí, hay objetos perdidos, un paraguas roto, un zapato sin cordones, la carta de una mujer, una cajita de fósforos? Pero al final esos objetos que parecían ser parte del azar se convierten en señales del destino. (96)

Destiny, therefore, lies in texts, be they literal or metaphorical. In order to decipher those texts and come to know one's destiny, one needs to pay careful attention to the seemingly unimportant objects that may turn out to be key elements in knowing/understanding life.

There is one text, however, that takes much more to decipher. The key text and the object of pursuit in the novel is called the *Ars Amandi*, and its pages hold the secret to how *anticuarios* can love without killing their beloved. It is the book Lebrón needs in order to live with Luisa. Once he is in possession of the desired text, however, Lebrón is faced with another problem. The *Ars Amandi* is not like any other book as its pages are sealed with gunpowder, and there is a secret order in which they must be opened. If one opens the book to the wrong page, it will explode. Lebrón takes a chance, finally unafraid to metaphorically cut open the pages of the book of his destiny: "Toda mi vida había transcurrido entre libros con las páginas pegadas. Era hora de ver qué había dentro" (263). Lebrón is unsuccessful, and the book catches fire, dooming

Lebrón to a destiny of loneliness. The act of reading, therefore, is not always straightforward, and it can be dangerous and even deadly, metaphorically speaking.

The loss of the book separates Lebrón forever from Luisa, whom he sends away to Europe before he can kill her, sealing his destiny to a continuation of Calisser's life as the owner of a used bookstore, where he hides behind other books, ones that do not hold the answers to his personal life quest. Ironically, he is left with nothing to say: "para él que se ha quedado sin palabras, todo se vuelve correspondencia y metáfora" (265). The metaphors and connections are the ones that fill the pages of *Los anticuarios*, which is self-consciously narrated by Lebrón, who reminds readers at the opening and closing of the book that he is typing on Calisser's old Hermes typewriter, further demonstrating that he is but a continuation of Calisser's lonely existence. The former typewriter repairman is now the one beating on the keys of the writer, striking the paper with the ink which will reproduce his metaphors for all to read, and ultimately marking the final period "con un alfiler de oro" (266). The same golden pin used to write blood text on the bodies of women, is now being used to mark the pages we have in front of us, piercing the reader's skin from a distance. The act of writing and the act of reading become equally vampiric and erotic, as each feeds on the other in an exchange of life-giving ideas.

In writing *Los anticuarios*, De Santis produces a purely Argentinean brand of vampire, an *anticuario* who is firmly planted in Buenos Aires, whose streets and history line the pages of the novel. While there are many elements of *Los anticuarios* that have yet to be analyzed, this study has focused on the metafictional aspect of the novel, demonstrating the interconnection between reading/writing, vampirism, and eroticism. Each process serves to represent the other in order to comment on reading and writing as processes that are driven by uncontrollable forces,



intertwining readers and authors in a vampiric type of eroticism where each consumes the other's metaphorical blood.

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