

column: parisien portrait

Le Stade de France

by Raana Haider

GLEAMING with lights on a winter's day at dusk, the gigantic national stadium that France has built for the 1998 World Cup soccer tournament looks like an ocean liner about to glide out to sea. The elliptical roof of metal and glass, suspended from 18 soaring steel masts, floats above the cityscape between Montmartre to the south and the ancient cathedral of Saint Denis to the north — so ethereal that it is difficult to imagine it covers an area as large as the Place de la Concorde in Paris," writes the International Herald Tribune (IHT) on the eve of the opening of Le Stade de



France (The Stadium of France) on 28 January 1998; built for the World Cup football 1998 extravaganza due to start 10 June 1998.

President Jacques Chirac of France accompanied by Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar of Spain graced the opening friendly match between France and Spain. Happily for France, the inaugural match ended in a score of France 1 and Spain 0. The IHT had headlined one of its on-the-ave articles, 'France Desperately Needs A Scorer to Inaugurate Its Stadium.' The hero of the match was Zinedine Zidane who scored the victo-

rious goal. According to Le Figaro headlines, "The Blues inaugurated the Stadium of France by a success against Spain: A Victory for History."

"The mission of the architects, Costantini, Macary, Regemal and Zublena was to create a dramatic public space calling to mind the stadiums of the ancient world. It is intended to be more than a sports stadium: a civic center as the Colosseum was to Rome," notes the IHT. "It has everything except the gladiators," says a spokesman. Today's entertainers, in the form of the aging British Rolling Stones are to appear in concert in late July and Johnny

Hallyday, the French aging rock n'roller is scheduled for September 1998.

Le Stade de France has a seating capacity of 80,000, making it the largest in France. The cost is put at a phenomenal \$ 445. France continues its endeavours in Les Grands Travaux (The Grand Works) which so characterizes architectural projects particularly, in Paris. "Its elliptical grandeur is a brilliant monument to French ambition... The stadium is part of a national tradition of building big for the greater glory of France, no matter what the cost. Even

before the booth first touches the ball, Le Stade seems certain to become a cultural and architectural success," notes the IHT. Other Grands Travaux launched by late President Francois Mitterand include the soaring Grande Arche de la Defense, the massive Bastille Opera, the Bibliotheque Nationale de France in the form of four L-shaped glass towers and the expanded and renovated Louvre Museum which includes the stunning Glass Pyramid in the Cour Napoleon.

The opening game of the World Cup 1998 on 10 June 1998 is between Brazil and Scotland.

book review

Fire of Bengal

By Nuzhat Amin Mannan

SET between 1929-31 based on life in Shantiniketan and recollections of a few journeys taken across India, *Fire of Bengal* by Rózsa Hajónczy was delicious to read. Eva Wimmer and her husband David Grant show a lot of sensitivity in this translation of *Bengali Tüz* which William Radice has edited. In the foreword Radice says that this is "in many ways a most discordant and unsettling book". The book is quite a mixture of tastes, traditions, conflicts, opinions, unities, varieties, prejudices, fact and fiction, in which East and West are (to borrow from Rózsa Hajónczy) "face to face like wolves." But Radice in his foreword is referring how this book might seem unsettling because Rózsa projects herself, "rooted to Hungary, wedded to European bourgeois standards and her Christian faith, re-

pelled by many aspects of Indian life, oppressed by the climate, at ease only with other Westerners or (Westernized Indians) and unable to share in her husband's oriental scholarship." Radice also thinks that the "East and West fail to understand each other". On reading *Fire of Bengal* I however had an overwhelming feeling that both East and West scan each other thoroughly. To misunderstand Rózsa Hajónczy I suppose could be quite easy. But I think it would be inappropriate to take *Fire of Bengal* as a mere indictment against a charming Indian idyll. As a writer Hajónczy writes in the same way Gertrude Rudiger the "unrepentantly" German mountaineer in the book climbs — Rózsa writes about her personal distress and discomforts, her exasperation and annoyance with India, and the Indian way but seeping through all of that is her understanding that India — with its magic, superstitions, its discrepancies,

its squalor and poverty — is as "massive" a "presence" as Radice thinks Rózsa's book *Fire of Bengal* itself is.

Hajónczy's acerbic observations on Hinduism, Gandhi, Shantiniketan, the

been involved in order to see, experience and write. It is this purposiveness to convey "the vivid palpability of life itself" as Radice puts it, is what sustains this book. Because Hajónczy it seems

Hajónczy shows how painful the consequences are when East-West cultural transferences take place creating disorientating mimics, as shown by Atanu Ray and his Hindu convert European wife Himjhuri. What then is driving Rózsa Hajónczy to write Fire of Bengal? I think she was longing for beauty beneath both Indian and European exteriors, beneath both East and West's surfaces.

movement or the Muslim households might seem really annoying if she had not taken care to swathe her reactions neatly and unostentatiously with the limitations of her own humanness and by not flinching from the toil she has

deliberately sets out to weave "autobiography, fiction, history and travelogue" her work doesn't suffer by lapsing into a grotesque memoir about her disillusionment with India. One cannot miss that in this book,

different views, religions, politics, cultures and ways are not only there to be contrasted but they are being revealing too. The orient is as placid as the occident is blindly certain about itself. Hajónczy shows how painful the consequences are when East-West cultural transferences take place creating disorientating mimics, as shown by Atanu Ray and his Hindu convert European wife Himjhuri. What then is driving Rózsa Hajónczy to write *Fire of Bengal*? I think she was longing for beauty beneath both Indian and European exteriors, beneath both East and West's surfaces.

This is exactly what is so sobering about *Fire of Bengal* despite the horrors, despite the drama, despite the eerie and jolting, the violence and despair, despite the passion that lay between its covers. *Fire of Bengal* was for me in many ways a most "settling" sort of a book.

I was lured by news of the book when it was published in Dhaka in 1992 coinciding with the 50th anniversary of Rózsa Hajónczy's death. It was quite easy to not put down this book with an almost indecipherable picture of Rózsa on its cover. Happily for me, I finished reading *Fire of Bengal* first and then read the foreword and the translator's note telling me about *Fire of Bengal* being an instant classic in Hungary, about Rózsa committing suicide in 1942, her Jewish husband taken in by the Gestapo, the ban being imposed on this book during the military regime. Eva Wimmer and David Grant's incredibly long wait to see this work published for the English reading world.

The book had already moved me — and all this was just what I needed to feel completely enchanted by *Fire of Bengal*. The "exotic" attracts — the writer as well as the reader, it seems!

profile

Daniel Pennac: "Imagination is Not a Life"

by Florence Raynal

AS a punishment, they were given an essay to write. Here is the subject: "You wake up one morning and realise that, in the night, you were turned into a grown-up. In a fit of panic, you rush into your parents' room. They have been turned into children. Continue the story". The teacher goes on, "Don't forget that imagination is not a lie". This essay was to take the three young pupils of the terrible Mr Crastaing a long way. For having dared to draw a caricature of their French teacher, in class, the three pals, Igor, Pierre and Nouridine truly find themselves in the situation thought up by their teacher.

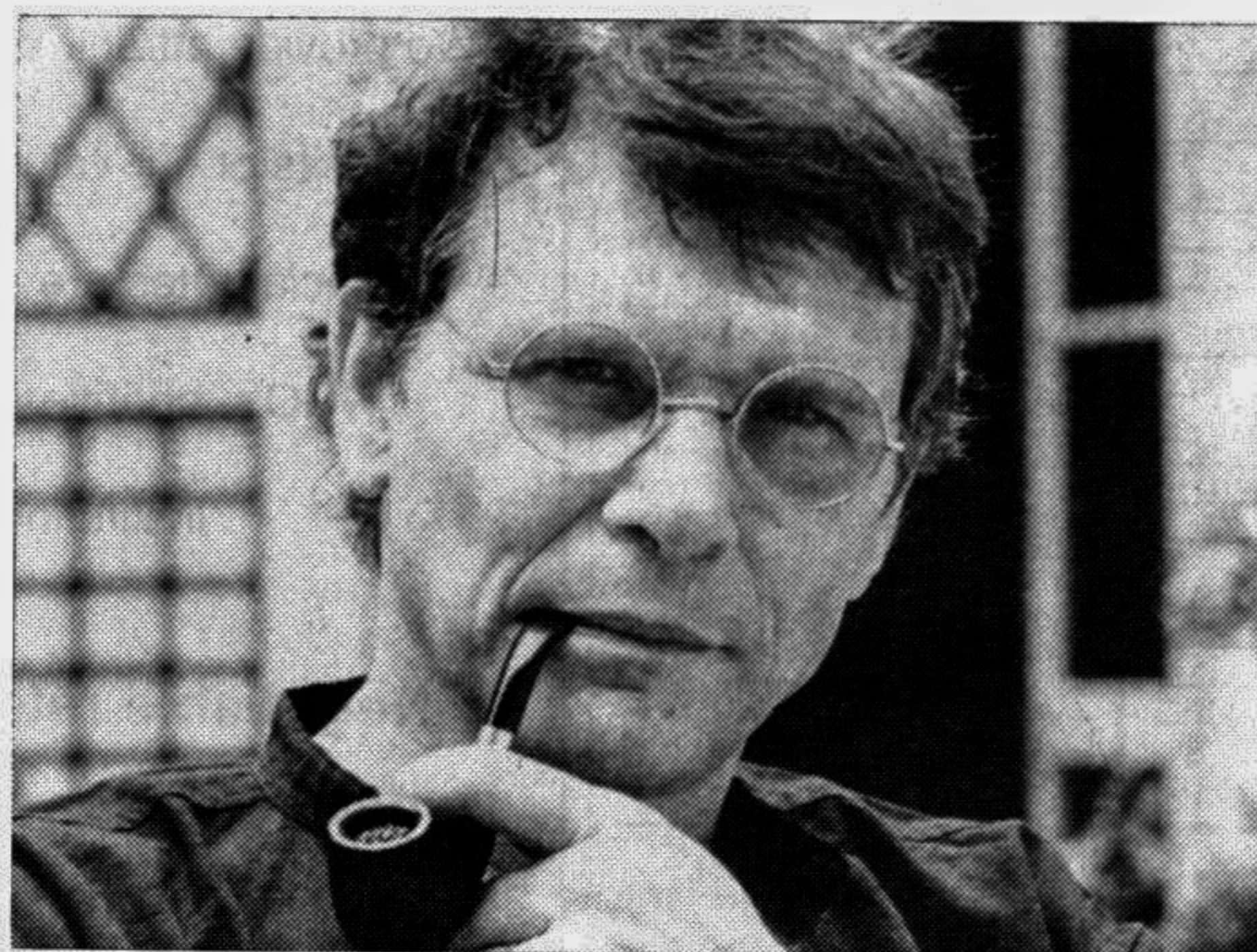
The plot of Daniel Pennac's new novel, "Messieurs les enfants", which was recently published by Gallimard, is based on the interplay of relations between the children and their parents. It is also the subject of a film directed by Pierre Boutron, which came out in September with the actors Pierre Arditi and Cather-

ine Jacob.

"Messieurs les enfants" is a comedy about memory and tolerance," Pierre Boutron, who co-scripted the film, explains. "As everything is reversed, the point of view changes depending on whether one is looking down at the kids or looking up at the adult world. This notion of which way one is looking is important. Indeed, the way of considering racism, the family, the relation to power and to difference is not the same depending on one's size."

It is also an occasion for Pennac to denounce the numerous people who are "amputated from their childhood, thrust prematurely onto the train of ambitions, programmed right from the egg, efficient from the outset and professional from the cradle". Yet he points out that there is a "remainder of childhood" in most people as "it is not easy to empty a child completely."

"Pennac is inventive and generous. With a hint of Queneau and Marcel Aymé in his pen", Pierre Boutron asserts. These compliments just as well describe the other



Daniel Pennac

works of this novelist, story-teller and essay-writer who was born in Casablanca in Morocco in 1944 and who started out on his career as a writer with two children's books, "Cabot-Caboche", published in 1982 and "l'Oeil du Loup" in 1984.

After these two novels with their already innovative tone, this French literature teacher set out to conquer adult readers. With "Au Bonheur des ogres" (1985), "La Fee Carabine" (1987), "La petite marchande de prose" (1989) and "Monsieur Malaussene" (1995), he began his famous series of thrilling detective novels with comical plots and a giddy rhythm, tracing the adventures of a certain Benjamin Malaussene, a scapegoat by trade.

Caustic reflections on modern society, a view of existence, crude image, delirious adventures, ravaging humour, tenderness, fantasy and violence blend together to the greatest delight of all, whether they are keen readers of thrillers or not. Pennac excels in the art of creating picturesque, natural characters and bringing them to life, and in building a world of his own,

permeated by the atmosphere of the working-class district of Belleville.

The first two volumes of his saga were published in the famous "Serie Noire" thriller series by Gallimard and the third (which earned its author the Livre prize in 1990) and fourth, in the prestigious white collection by the same publisher. Today they can be found in famous "Livres de Poche" paperback series as can his essay on reading called "Comme un roman", which came out in 1992 and which was unexpectedly successful.

With his writings, Pennac has won over a large diversity of readers, no doubt, as Alain Quesnel writes in the "Dictionnaire Encyclopedique de la Littérature Française" (Encyclopedic Dictionary of French Literature), because "Each person can read it with at least as much jubilation as the author feels when he writes and tells a story," and thanks to his ambition to "have an adult reader find something of the pleasure he had as a child in listening to a story".

— Actualité En France

poems

Two Poems by Aminur Rahman

The Sculpture

I have carved
your statue
out of the morning fog.

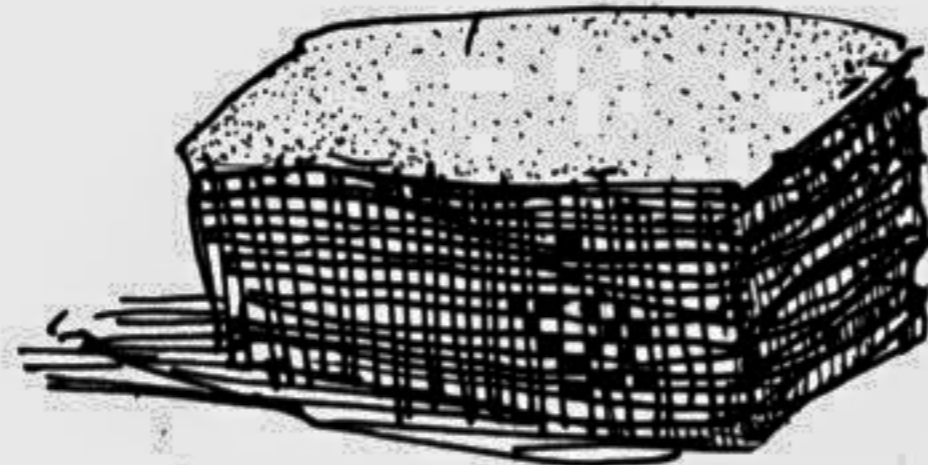
closing my eyes
I sit
in the midst of fog
how intimately it settles
on my cheek, nose and eyes.

I can feel now
your eyes, lips and hands
the stank, the birth mark.

leaving the light behind
you are emerging
from the womb of the fog
and slowly take a deep root into my being.

Life-2

I was not within me
a while ago
I can't even remember
where I was.



those moments have
vaporised.
what have I been doing?
eating, taking a stroll
or making love.
oh no. I can't recall anything
I just can't remember
those lost moments.

Translated by Ziaul Karim

Cry of a Criminal

by Arifa Ghani

Forgive me, mother-in-law
For I have done you a great wrong.
I cannot humble myself to you enough.
I believe I deserve more punishment
Than simply not being fed,
Or doing all the back-breaking chores of the house
From the time of Fajr prayer to long past midnight
When I must administer
To your son's lustful hunger,
With my arms and legs still throbbing from your thrashing.
My father was a fool.
He did not realise that he ought to have provided you
With not just all his life savings,
his house, and
his land
But also with the money
To maintain your family through life.
He ought to have made himself responsible
For your daughter's marriage as well
So that he could find as considerable a mother-in-law
For her as you have been to me.
I cannot find the words to beg forgiveness
On behalf of my foolish father
Who accepted your threatening proposal

After several refusals
For, as he said, your son was a drunkard and a whoremonger.
Oh my! How dare he forget the adjectives before the nouns?
For your son is the most polite drunkard and
most discreet whoremonger in the village.
Please, mother-in-law,
Forgive me for doing the great wrong
Of being a daughter-in-law.

As I See You

by Helal Kabir Chowdhury

Beauty lies in everywhere of you
my thirst is never content
It's no fault of me,
I am not to be blamed,
It's universal.

Remember my First few words
shrouded in ecstasy,
Bewildered by the fragrance
That you wore
On the finest night of ours.

As someone said
You are like a defenseless rabbit.
I feel cuddling, caressing, and loving
Never ignore but make you eternal.

