

Pennac, “I write because I’m hungry”

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“Why do you write?” is the question that anyone would ask a writer. And if the writer’s name is **Daniel Pennac**, then the question becomes almost impossible to avoid. “It’s as if you asked me why I eat. I write because I’m hungry,” Pennac said.

Fabio Gambaro, a journalist and friend of the author, followed up the answer intelligently, revealing to the numerous people at the Teatro Sociale, in Luino, that the recipient of Chiara Prize for Lifetime Achievement is not announcing the end of his career. “Don’t worry, **he’s working on a new novel**,” Gambaro said.

In Luino, Pennac gave evidence of his great generosity, both as a man and as a novelist, although he admitted that, socially, he does not see himself as a writer. “I feel like one, only when I’m absorbed in writing. I’m a bit like a whale that spends all day underwater, eating plankton, in my case a plankton of words, and reemerges and spits out all that doesn’t taste good, because the whale has a sophisticated palate. This means that after a dive, I write four or five lines,” Pennac explained.

He doesn’t play the role of the intellectual, because he isn’t one. From the time that the intelligentsia claimed that the novel was dead, he has always had just one goal: to write popular novels. And, to the delight of Feltrinelli, the readers proved him right. “**In my novels, there’s my style**”, **the writer said.** Pennac is not one to mince his words, in fact, the choice of each one is the result of many immersions. “It took me five years to write *Diary of a body*, which means that I didn’t write for four.”

Pennac has an inclusive view of the world and of Europe, and what he gave in Luino was also a lovely lesson in humanity. But then, how could the creator of **Benjamin Malaussène**, the quintessence of the European melting pot, not open the borders to the Syrians? “The refugees aren’t seen as a group of individuals, but as a mass, which gives a terrifying idea of the problem. The media speak to our self-preservation instincts, which are characterised by two fears: **the fear of others and the fear of change.** **Let’s forget the newspapers and think about this: it is the immigrants who made today’s France. Tomorrow’s France will be made by the Syrians. Let’s just take it easy,**” Pennac concluded.

di Michele Mancino Translated by Mazzucchelli, Ossola & Lodo (Reviewed by Prof. Rolf Cook)