

# In Between Reality and Literature: Reflections on The Creation of National Identity in The Journalistic Writing of Richard Weiner

Vanda Pickett, *St. Hugh's College, Oxford*

This paper derives from the research I have done for my thesis which concerns the literary work, more precisely, the narrative prose of the Czech modernist writer Richard Weiner. Here, I would like to focus, however briefly, on Weiner's journalistic writing, especially in connection with the questions of national identity. The texts this paper is mostly based on are Weiner's earlier feuilletons, namely the 1912-1913 feuilletons collected in a never published volume *Clichy-Odéon*<sup>1</sup> and a published collection of feuilletons from 1918-1919, entitled *Trásnický dejinných dnu*<sup>2</sup>.

A tradition of close relations between literature and journalism, can be observed in Czech literature since the beginnings of the 'Czech national revival' in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century when the revival of literary use of the Czech language was closely linked to the existence of Czech language newspaper and periodicals, and the process of the linguistic and cultural as well as political emancipation of the Czech nation inside the Habsburg empire is often judged by the situation of and in the national press. Since the Czech literature, as literary critics and historians often complain, has always, with the exception of the period from 1918 to 1938, had to play additional, cultural and political, roles in Czech society, many writers endorsed this intimate connection between literature and journalism, a form of writing requiring referential, as well as national, political and ideological responsibility, historical awareness and moral authority.

The situation, whose origins could also be considered to lie in the practical circumstances: the very small number of Czech speaking intellectuals as well as rather limited publishing opportunities for Czech language literature (resulting from a very limited reading public) making the periodicals a very attractive platform, crystallised into a distinct tradition of writer-journalist, and the 'feuilleton'. As the most prominent representatives of this tradition we can name, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jan Neruda, in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Karel Capek, and taking this tradition into the 21<sup>st</sup> century are writers such as Ludvík Vaculík.

Richard Weiner (1884-1937), according to a growing number of critics one of the leading writers of Czech 20<sup>th</sup> cent. literature, is a prime example of this tradition. In 1912, Weiner decided to become a writer, he left his promising

---

<sup>1</sup> Literární archiv, PNP

<sup>2</sup> Tisk. Spol. Polygrafia, Brno, 1919

career as a chemical engineer and moved to Paris. Although this decision was a difficult one, causing Weiner many a sleepless night, the decision to become a journalist (which was to become his full-time occupation for the rest of his life) seems to have come entirely naturally, as a logical component of a literary career. Except for the war years spent in Prague, (Weiner was sent home from the front just after six months, having suffered a nervous breakdown), he spent the rest of his life in Paris, as a regular correspondent for the important daily newspaper *Lidové noviny*, occasionally writing also for other Czech periodicals.

The body of his journalistic writing is thus enormous, and, unfortunately, despite the efforts of Weiner's monographer, Jindrich Chaloupecký, not yet entirely documented and, again despite a large project of publishing Weiner's collected works, still unpublished. Considering the relative scarcity of critical attention to Weiner's literary work, it might seem superfluous dedicating time to study his journalistic writing. However, there are many reasons why it is not so. Not only is Weiner a member of a generation of writers many of whom had a prominent journalistic careers (Viktor Dyk, Karel and Josef Capek) and therefore his work should be placed in this context, but also his own literary work is necessarily connected to his journalistic writing, we can learn about his opinions of literature and art from his numerous reviews or Weiner's journalistic texts can be studied in their thematic and stylistic relation to his literary work. However, even in their own right Weiner's feuilletons are worth studying, as Gustav Winter, another Paris correspondent and Weiner's friend, notices: 'But is not his journalistic writing of that time a wonderful source for study of this time-period? ... This time-period with its specific fragrance Weiner perceived and interpreted however more by an intuition than hard study. He was proud of it – and rightly so.'<sup>3</sup>

[„Ale není-li jeho tehdejší publicistická činnost jedinečným pramenem ke studiu doby? [...] Tuto dobu a její specifickou vůni vnímal a interpretoval Weiner ovšem spíše intuitivním vyzněním než úporným studiem. Zakládal si na tom – a právem.“]

Weiner has written about most aspects of life, politics, culture, reviewing new theatre plays, books, art exhibitions, everyday life and interesting people, big crimes and other 'faits divers'. A rather interesting part of his Paris writing was his regular fashion column in *Lidové noviny*, written under a female pseudonym, *Filína*, a name he later used to sign also some of his other articles. In the story *Ela* (from the collection *Lazebník*), we can find an echo of these texts, when the narrator describes his cousin Ela in these words:

'Maybe you will imagine her better, if in a style of a fashion writer I shall write: 'In a dark room, a woman was sitting, who, although being of a *certain*

---

<sup>3</sup> Gustav Winter: Richard Weiner v Paříži, *Lidové noviny* 6/1/1937

age, never left the path that a woman has to follow if she has the ambition of always being *à la page*.<sup>4</sup> [‘Snad si ji představíte lépe, vmysím-li se do slohu módní referentky a napiš-li: „V šerém pokoji sedela žena *jistého* sice už věku, která nikdy však nesešla z cesty, jíž má dbáti ženská krása, mající citizádost býti vždy *à la page*.“’]

Signing articles by different names might not be unusual in journalism, but Weiner did take this practice as far as attacking his own articles in texts written under a different name. According to Martin Gaži<sup>5</sup>, Weiner sent in 1918 to LN under the name of ‘Pelegrinus’ a critical reaction to his own articles signed usually as ‘Poutník’. He also published, under the mark rd (another of his usual signatures) a very critical reaction to his own first ever published book, the short stories collection ‘Lítice’. Such practices can be viewed simply as games that journalistic anonymity would allow Weiner to play, however, considering his literary work where the theme of duality, multiplicity and decomposition of the self, or the mind is often developed, one could ask whether this game is not more serious, expressing some deep anxiety and uncertainty about the coherence and unity of human mind.

Questions of identity, personal or national, which are crucial for Weiner’s literary work, are not less so for his journalistic writing. In a letter to his parents in 1913 Weiner writes: ‘I am neither Jewish, nor Czech, nor German, nor French’<sup>6</sup>, a statement which illustrates well the extent and complexity of this question for Weiner. We must add, however, that at times Weiner showed a much less pessimistic attitude, considering himself Czech through and through (with the ever present underlying shade of Jewishness). But explorations of the area related to national identity and character (particularly entangled and acute in Central Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century) remain the core interest of Weiner’s journalism throughout his life.

He had focused on the two nations he had loved and known well, the Czechs and the French, and in his feuilletons, these two often find themselves symbolised and even personified in the images in the two cities, Prague and Paris. However, when writing about France, even just about a new book or an exhibition, Weiner’s goal is not only to inform the reader, he regularly uses the text to draw comparisons between the French and the Czechs, making general remarks on Czech politics, culture, history or national character as a whole. They also serve to point out to misconceptions, false perceptions and stereotyping of all things French back home.

---

<sup>4</sup> Richard Weiner: ‘Ela’, Lazebník, TORST, 1998, p. 182

<sup>5</sup> Martin Gaži: Publicista Richard Weiner o válce za války, Tvar, r. 9, 6/1998

<sup>6</sup> In J. Mourková: První pobyt Richarda Weinerja v Paříži, Památník národního písemnictví, Praha, 1967, s. 51. Letter from 18/7/1913.

To correct these misconceptions about French life and culture is one of the main tasks Weiner sets himself. Therefore, his review 'Freud a francouzská literatura' from 1922, looking at French psychological literature of the recent times (and incidentally offering no connection whatsoever with Surrealism which appropriated Freud's teachings two years later in the Surrealist Manifesto), concludes with a significant analysis of the Czech 'reading' of French culture, criticising its 'bias' for the avant-garde which, according to Weiner, led to an excessive adoration of certain writers and intellectuals while others are unfairly overlooked. Weiner blames the Czech intellectuals and even 'certain critics' for fabricating before the war several 'French geniuses' purely for the use of Czech readers while nowadays these are completely forgotten by the Czechs despite their continuing literary activity in France. From this, Weiner draws observations about the Czech obsession with being 'à la page', following the latest fashions, without digesting and understanding, as well as measuring the value of their own people by their reception abroad, and expecting this to be the case also for others, for example the French. It is the insecurity of the new nation which feels that it must not be seen as left behind, old-fashioned, that Weiner is critical about. Realizing that this criticism will not be well taken by Czech readers, he includes in anticipation a justification of his own attitude, which, as he says, 'might mean that one will be called a reactionary. Yet, one must not be frightened by this.'<sup>7</sup>

It is not only the Czechs, however, who are under attack for misunderstanding the French culture. In an excellent feuilleton about the cultural history of Montmartre from 1913, for example, Weiner recalls the Moulin Rouge and similar places at Montmartre about which 'the foreigners think that they 'harbour the real esprit gaullois' but in reality they contain nothing but filth [...] there, where, for a time, was the heart of Paris, is nowadays America'<sup>8</sup>

[ 'myslí si cizinec, že je zde „pesten pravý galský spirit“, ale v nich[ž] v pravde je jen svinstvo. [...] tam, kde bylo po nejakou dobu srdce Paříže, je nyní Amerika. ']

These places are entirely false, Americanised, and have nothing in common with the 'real' older Montmartre of the impressionists and the Chat noir cabaret. This seems a particularly poignant and ironic remark in view of the recent Hollywood 'reinvention' of the Moulin Rouge, which in Weiner's eyes would probably be a sad but somewhat fascinating case of a doubling of false identity.

In her recent book, Marie Langerová characterises Weiner-journalist as 'boritel národních mýtů'<sup>9</sup> [the destroyer of national myths] and mentions *Trásnický dějinných dnu* to support this argument. Rather than that, I would suggest these

---

<sup>7</sup> Freud a francouzská literatura, LN, 25/7/1922

<sup>8</sup> 'Útok na baštu', LN 11.6.1913, intended for Clichy-Odéon.

<sup>9</sup> Marie Langerová: Wiener, Host, Brno, 2000, p. 100

earlier texts (*Clichy-Odéon* and *Trásnický dejinných dnu* ) are a sort of ‘destroyers of the tourist’s myths’, and these are not only myths about France, but for example also a myth which many tourists come to Prague to look for still today, ‘mysterious, and magical Prague’. According to Weiner, this Prague was rightly dealt with in the first days of independence of 1918:

One thing, it seems, was removed sound and proper in the first days of the republic: that is what we used to call the Prague fairy-tale. The Prague fairy-tale were the palaces and what was fairy-tale-like about them was their dereliction, melancholy and blindness of their windows. The Prague fairy-tale was for ever an unhappy tale. So, gone is the murky charm of the Prague palaces.<sup>10</sup>

[‘Jedno, zdá se, odklidila republika rádně hned v prvých dnech: totiž to, co jsme nazývali pražskou pohádkou. Pražskou pohádkou byly paláce, a pohádkovým byly na nich opuštěnost, zasmušilost a slepota oken. Pražská pohádka byla po veky pohádkou neveselou. Nuže, je veta po pošmourném kouzlu pražských paláců.’]

Weiner nearly always considered national identity in relation to the alien or the Other. Trying to understand the Other is in his feuilletons represented as a way to a better understanding and a possible improvement of oneself and he devoted his entire journalistic career to making Czechs understand more deeply the French (their culture, life, ‘national character’) and, less officially, also vice versa.

Although employed by *Lidové noviny* as a regular Paris correspondent, he was not a political correspondent, and was therefore free to develop in his articles and feuilletons often very ‘atemporal’ personal reflections and observations. He was ‘explaining’ France to the Czech readers by ‘reporting’ the process by which he was coming to understand it himself, always assuming the position of an outsider, despite having made the place his home for some fifteen years. He had however, often assumed this position even when writing about Bohemia, and this ‘outsiderness’, always present in his texts, grew stronger and stronger with the time spent abroad. Weiner did not truly belong anywhere, which gives his journalistic texts an ability to contemplate and analyse from a distance, although never impersonally. In a feuilleton from 1914 he writes: ‘One wonders around the world, soaked, as they say, in a different culture. [...] one day one feels as if one became indifferent about which soil is which. [...] Have you got any homeland at all? – No, I am a ‘globetrotter’. – You see, it is a bad thing to be a ‘globetrotter’. – I know, Barrès calls it ‘déraciné’...’<sup>11</sup>

---

<sup>10</sup> *Trásnický dejinných dnu*, p. 20

<sup>11</sup> Finis, LN 7/7/1914, intended for *Clichy-Odéon*

[‘Clovek se tluce svetem a, jak se tak říká, smácí se v cizí kultuře.[...] jednoho dne cítí, jakoby mu byla puda jako puda. [...] Máš ty ještě vubec vlast? – Ne, já jsem globetrotter. – Vidiš, to je zlá vec být globetrotter. – Já vím, Barrès tomu říká „déraciné“...’]

This more or less voluntary exclusion from the community is softened in the 1918-1919 feuilletons collected in *Trásnický dejinných dnu*. Weiner, like many other Czech writers (some of them famous for their solitary, pessimistic or cynical dispositions such as Ladislav Klíma or Jakub Deml), fell under the spell of the euphoric atmosphere of the birth of the independent Czechoslovakia in October 1918.

In these feuilletons, in particular in the first section of the collection which is set in Prague, Weiner is (or believes to be) identifying himself with his nation, while in the second section, set in Paris where Weiner followed the Czechoslovak mission to the Peace Conference in 1919, he quickly regains his ‘outside’ position. Although even in the ‘Prague’ section, a sign of exclusion can be detected in that Weiner always points to his profession of a journalist which necessarily puts him in a different position from everyone else, namely the ‘reader’. I would like to look at the collection of *Trásnický* more closely in its role of a ‘reportage on the process of identity construction’ which is that of the Czech or even Czechoslovak nation. What is also significant, is the language used to describe this process, the metaphors and imagery which come into play as well the narrative devices Weiner uses to represent the atmosphere of this time-period.

The overall tone characteristic for the collection is optimistic, full of hope for a future, which, however hard work it may require, is in the hands of individual people and nations who have the opportunity to make it better. It is a making of a new world. It was not long, though, before this optimistic outlook faded in Weiner’s articles as he did not subscribe to the popular ‘pragmatism’ of writers and journalists such as Karel Capek and some of the political and cultural developments in the new Czechoslovakia.

František Götz has very accurately labelled *Trásnický* as impressionist writing.<sup>12</sup> It would be hard to argue with this definition, since these texts very often miss what could seem to be their main point, namely the information. In several texts about the newly established Czechoslovak Parliament, for example, all goings on are described in detail, appearance, clothes, hair cut, tone of voice, diction of a speaker and the reactions of his audience without even one mention about the content of the MP’s speech. What we get is an excellent painting of the atmosphere, personal reflections and even speculations, but never any conventional, ‘real’ information. Furthermore, Weiner’s feuilletons can take on a rather enigmatic form for those who are not familiar with the latest news of the

---

<sup>12</sup>František Götz: ‘Richard Weiner jako povídkár a feuilletonista’, Lída 1920.

day, which nowadays includes most of us, since this knowledge is assumed, not always provided by the author. This presupposition of previous knowledge is sometimes used as a stylistic manoeuvre in Weiner's feuilletons when the text describes the process of the author's discovery of the news, but for the required effect on the reader his own previous knowledge of this news is essential.

This type of feuilleton, as well as many others in *Trásnický*, uses the present tense, another device of the impressionistic method, creating thus an effect of bringing the reader closer to the author, indeed, making him the author's companion and co-observer. This stylistic device can take over reality, shifting the text away from its referential position, since it produces an illusion of simultaneity of perception and writing, and even further, removing it from any 'reality' as in the author's statement at the end of one feuilleton which reads: 'Spím.' [I am asleep.]<sup>13</sup>

I have mentioned two sections of *Trásnický*, the 'Prague' and the 'Paris' one. There are, in fact three: Prague, the new Czechoslovak Parliament and Paris. These three sections correspond to the three main spaces where a nation (its identity as a state) is constituted: the streets, the political institutions, represented by the parliament, and the international political scene, which is here the 1919 Paris Peace Conference where representatives of most of the world powers of the time are assembled.

Space in general seems to be the principal 'hero' of Weiner's feuilletons. People have a role as far as they are part of a particular space. Toponyms are of utmost importance in these texts, the first feuilleton of the collection is constructed on a succession of Prague toponyms (names of streets, squares, city quarters). Places are seen as sites of historical memory as well as blank canvases onto which a new history of Europe will be written. The image of a place as a canvas, a white page which is there to be filled is not unusual in Weiner's writing, we can find this image developed further in the prose-poems 'The Space Called Paris' and 'Michaud or the Parisian Pastoral' [Prostor Paříž, Michaud cili Pařížské pastorále] included in Weiner's poetry collection *Zátiší s kulichem, herbárem a kostkami* where Paris is represented as a blank page which can be filled with potential stories.

Writing of the new history into old place should not erase their previous history, this is particularly stressed in a feuilleton in which Weiner criticises the destruction of the baroque column on Prague Old Town square, which was mistakenly taken for a monument of Habsburg domination. Weiner argues that the column should have stayed whatever its original meaning. It is the new, proud nation which can give new meanings to old monuments, only the weak is afraid of the ghosts of the past. The historical memory of places should be saved, and the only criterion for monuments to be judged by is an aesthetic one (Weiner

---

<sup>13</sup> Trásnický dejinných dnu, p. 100

writes: 'Erect bravely again Our Lady's Column and do not touch [...] statues of St. John of Nepomuk, nor the nice memorial to Radecký. - But away with Francis I! Not because he was a Habsburg, but because his sculptor was really bad.'<sup>14</sup>

[‘Vztycťe jen nebojácně sloup mariánský znovu a nedotýkejte se [...] ani štatuí Jana z Pomuku, ani pekného pomníku Radeckého - Ale hrr! na Františka I. Ne že byl Habsbukem, nýbrž že jeho sochar za nic nestál.’])

The main space symbolising the nation and the new Czechoslovak state in Weiner's feuilletons, is Prague (as Paris is often, as I have already mentioned, the symbol for France). It is often represented as a unified entity, personified or objectified, even seen as a body and endowed with bodily functions: a demonstration is seen as Prague with a swollen stomach, constipated, an attempted murder of the prime minister is a disease trying to attack the city. (With this 'pražské bricho' one cannot help thinking of Zola's 'Ventre de Paris'). In one of the feuilletons, Weiner wishes to see the city as a toy house which can be opened from the back and a full cross-section of the life of its people is revealed. The house, as Weiner says, 'a enormous diversity of destinies, thoughts and feelings hidden under [this] uniform word'<sup>15</sup> could also be that of the nation, unified in its diversity.

The vocabulary employed in the texts in connection with the new nation is in keeping with the excited and optimistic tone I have mentioned, and derives often from the semantic fields of beauty and happiness: the colours of the flag are beautiful, they are 'the multipliers of joy' [rozmnožovatelkami radosti]<sup>16</sup>, the train, ready for the delegation to the Paris Conference is beautiful, standing in a 'perfect line'<sup>17</sup>, the Prague Castle is suddenly beautiful and friendly, the army is liked (as it is said, for the first time in three hundred years), even the traffic in the streets becomes 'a pleasant and familiar music' [milou a divernou hudbou]<sup>18</sup>. This familiarity or domesticity is an important feature of the new nation, it represents democracy, and is often put in contrast with the stuffy, ceremonious nature of the Habsburg administration. It is therefore significant, that important political events and assemblies are represented as family gatherings, family celebrations. It is the accessibility (or rather perceived accessibility) of the new state which is emphasised, accessibility and 'humanness' of its leaders as well as

---

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p. 58

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p. 16

<sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 60

the physical buildings (exemplified by the Prague Castle, which is now inhabited, 'democratised' and accessible -at least to the journalists).

On the other hand, there is also a mythical perspective in the creation of a new state, and the pathos of this dimension is reflected in the use of vocabulary of religion as well as mythology: '[the flag] is as if giving a blessing in a sacerdotal gesture'<sup>19</sup> ['[prapor] jako by žehnal sacerdotálním gestem'];

'the city so beautiful, made years younger, [...] with the joy of the resurrected nation, with joy so divine and calm that you feel like kneeling down and praying to it, in tears. It is happening on a winter's day, shortly before the celebration of the birth of the Saviour'<sup>20</sup>

['mesto nádherné, omlazeno o veky, [...] to s radostí vzkříšeného národa, s radostí tak božskou a klidnou, že bys poklekl a modlil se k ní, slze. Deje se tak v zimní den, tesne pred památkou zrození Spasitelova.'];

'looking at these melancholy and deferential ushers it seems to me that with exactly such respect the girls were escorted, who, all dressed in white, were destined to become a meal of the Minotaur'<sup>21</sup>

['pri pohledu na tyto zasmušile uctivé sluhý připadá mne, s takovouto asi úctou vyprovázeny byly dívky bíle odené, urcené k tomu, aby si na nich pochutnal Minotaurus.'];

But already this pathos, this euphoric and idealistic tone is not without a little correction from the author himself, just as elsewhere, for instance, he entitles the section of parliamentary feuilletons 'Panoptikum Národního shromáždění [The Circus of the National Assembly].

As I have already suggested, the relation to the Other is for Weiner an important component of the constitution of national identity. In Trásnický, we can find representation of two types of these relations: that to the rest of Europe (the Allies), and that to the 'Other within', the Germans (which seems here to refer to anyone of the German tongue). Europe represents democracy and freedom which the new Czechoslovak state is now to join, recognition of the new state by other European countries is important, and emphasis is put on the planned visits by European leaders and the interest of foreign journalists. The Allies, most of all France, are hailed as heroes and saviours, although a little scepticism towards America and the excess of admiration of all things American

---

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, p. 6

<sup>20</sup> *ibid.*, p. 34-35

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*, p. 44

can be heard again, in the phrase: Blessed be the uncle from America who is not *just* simply rich!<sup>22</sup> [‘Blahoslaven bud strýc z Ameriky, jenž není *jen* bohatý!’].

More significant, and complicated, is the relationship with, what I referred to as the ‘Other within’, the newly created German minority. From the first pages of *Trásnický*, Weiner mentions them, wondering about their feelings. Here once again, the position of an outsider which Weiner often adopts, transpires in his immediate concern for the new outsiders. An important point about the new nation is also made here, as the lack of violence, hatred and resentment on the part of the Czechoslovak people is emphasised. Almost every feuilleton of the first section of *Trásnický* describes a scene with ‘Germans’; the author meets a German friend on the street, who seems to him like ‘a stranger, as if a prisoner’, Weiner says goodbye in German to his friend who thanks him in Czech and ‘his eyes said that he was thanking for more than just the greeting.’<sup>23</sup> [‘jeho oci pravili, že dekuje za více než za pozdrav.’], in another feuilleton, a German lady cannot understand her husband’s fears, since she thinks the evens are ‘overwhelming, marvellous, beautiful as a fairy-tale – a fairy-tale without a monster’<sup>24</sup> [‘ohromující, úžasné, pohádkově krásné – a je to pohádka, kde není lidožrouta.’]

This might be an largely idealised vision of the situation, but what is important here is, that it lays down the fundamental moral requirement, which in turn provides a justification for the new country’s existence. Even later, when this idealised view of his country had faded in his feuilletons, in fact turned into very deep pessimism, Weiner kept an interest in the fate of the Czechoslovak German minority and very soon understood the problems that were arising from the not very harmonious coexistence. He also grew rather critical towards the French politics in the 1930’s and the blind dependence of Czechoslovakia on France. In 1935 he wrote two letters to Lidové noviny’s editor, Ferdinand Peroutka, warning against these threats, writing among other, ‘let us try to persuade France that it is chasing after illusions, [...] Let us also try to accept the idea that peace can only be upheld if we allow at least a certain minimal saturation of Germany, instead of obstructing it every time ... until Hitler helps himself without asking.’<sup>25</sup>

[‘zkusme aspon presvedcit Francii, že pronásleduje chiméry. [...] Zkusme také smír s myšlenkou, že udržíme mír jen tehdy, svolíme-li aspon k jisté minimální saturaci Nemecka, místo abychom jí pokaždé překáželi ...až do té chvíle, kdy si Hitler poslouží bez ptání.’]

---

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>23</sup> *ibid.*, p. 7

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p. 5

<sup>25</sup> Quoted by Jindrich Chalupecký: *Expresionisté*, TORST, 1992, p. 67

These letters were never sent, since Weiner could not believe any more anyone would pay any attention to them. He was probably right.

To conclude, I would like to mention one last area often depicted in *Trásnický dejinných dnu*, which is that of the media. Picturing himself as journalist, describing other journalists, their professional relationship, the world of the press in general as well as the internal workings and technicalities of writing for a newspaper, Weiner appreciates the role the media have in the constitution of the new state and its identity. And not only the press, but also film, as a growing form of mass media is, although not very sympathetically, portrayed. The media, in general, are often described with an undertone of cynicism, their lack of emotional involvement and business-like attitude towards events taken as ‘news’ which are to be ‘processed’.

Newspapers (and journalists) also function as a link between the three spaces of *Trásnický*, the streets, the parliament and the international political scene; although the frequent image of torn bits of newspaper lying on the streets could be once again read as a sign of the fleeting nature of today’s ‘news’. And the ‘panoptikum’, the ‘circus’ of the big political gathering (be it the Czechoslovak parliament or the Paris Peace Conference) includes in a rather democratic way both the politicians and the journalists. Weiner, describing for example the creation of the League of Nations, is reduced to the depiction of his fellow reporters since he cannot see much past their crowd, to which he refers to as the ‘human menagerie’ (p.204), and concludes: ‘And the world press (that’s us!), they are also just men. They also have daughters to be married – but those are in a significantly worse position. The world press! Tables crack underneath them; they climb onto chairs; grabbing at each other’s coats and stepping on each other’s corns. And in the meanwhile a new world order is being born.’<sup>26</sup>

[‘A světový tisk (to jsme my!), tot také páni. Také oni mají dcery na vdávání – ale s temi je to poznání hur. Světový tisk! Praskají pod ním stoly; leze na židle; druh druhá chytá za šosy a druh druhu šlape na kurí oka. Zatím co se rodí nový světový rád.]

Also a more personal type of reflection on journalism and writing runs through the feuilletons of *Trásnický* (and not only those). Weiner deliberately and explicitly places himself in the Czech journalistic tradition I have mentioned earlier, referring to Neruda and his style of writing. This self-consciousness is another feature that follows Weiner into his literary work, becoming one of the main principles of some of his most complex texts. Typical also are his reflections on the difficulties of linguistic representation, in *Trásnický* most clearly expressed in a comment on the difficulty of anchoring in words the chaotic and overwhelming events of the autumn of 1918

---

<sup>26</sup> *Trásnický dejinných dnu*, p. 205

'to us, journalists, who in the same way as everyone else will stand face to face with the miracle, knowing well, like all of you, that there are no images nor words for it, excited, like everyone else, by the feeling of happiness that is so large that it resembles horror ... and yet: only we will undertake the pointless work, and our resisting pens – more sensible than us – conquered by the brute force of journalistic duty will write words, words about something that can be expressed with as much difficulty as to express the Word itself.<sup>27</sup>

[‘nás novináru, kteří stejně jako druzí staneme před zázrakem, dobře vedouce, stejně jako vy všichni, že mu není obrazu ni slov, stejně rozrušení pocitem štěstí, které je tak veliké, že se podobá desu ... a přece: my jediní podejmeme se nesmyslné práce, a naše vzpouzející se péra – rozumnější nás – překonaná hrubou silou novinářské povinnosti budou psát slova, slova o necem, co vyjádřit lze právě tak málo, jako Slovo samo.’]

It seems to me that these words express Weiner's approach to journalism as well as the way he had set about depicting the birth of the new state better than any other definition I might propose myself.

---

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p. 20