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“Mystification as a Cultural and Humoresque
Phenomenon in Modern Czech Literature Against the
Background of European Cultures (With Special
Reference to Jára da Cimrman).”

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Introduction

Mystification, hoaxes and frauds are created on purpose to trick an audience into perceiving something that is actually false, as real. The audience is made to believe in things such as false authorship or a false place and time in which a certain piece of work was created, among other things. Some mystified works or documents are made for illicit financial or material gain, some are prepared to support a certain religion or movement, and some are a humorous joke intended to ridicule, expose or cause embarrassment to a famous individual. As long as the mystification remains a humorous game, it is harmless and should not be treated as a deception. Some of them remain unexposed for decades, whilst others are short-term jokes – for instance many of those connected with April Fool’s Day – and debunked shortly after having been created.¹ In other examples, the audience becomes aware of the deception at an early stage (as is the intention of the author), but nevertheless agrees to participate in it. Conversely, a parody could be transformed into an example of "accidental mystification" when its spectators do not make the humoresque connections, or simply fail to observe the joke. The history of literature also reveals cases where fraudulent pieces were created to support the raising of a nation.

The history of literature records a wide range of hoaxes – disputes concerning the authorship of this or that classical work are not uncommon in literary criticism. For instance, classical scholars have long debated the authorship of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, and whether or not a poet called Homer ever actually existed in Ancient Greece at all. Renaissance scholars have frequently argued about the authorship of the individual tragedies and comedies of Shakespeare and even whether such an English dramatist ever existed at all.²

¹Gordon, S., *The book of hoaxes. An A-Z of famous fakes, frauds and cons*, London 1995, pp.16-17

The purpose of this research is to look more closely at some of the significant aspects of mystification in European, and more specifically, Czech literature and culture. Three examples will form the core of the research, these being the *Manuscript of Dvůr Králové* and the *Manuscript of Zelená Hora*, as well as the phenomenon of *Jára Cimrman*. These examples have been chosen because the first two formed the precedent for *Jára Cimrman's* resonance and reception in Czech culture, and because all three emphasise the specific nature of mystification in Czech culture, and thus illustrate its relationship with mystification in European literature and culture.

Because mystification has its roots deep in European literature and culture, we must first outline the history of this phenomenon. Following that, we will be in a position to more closely research particular aspects of mystification. For this, we will use several significant examples taken from across European culture and literature. As we wish to research the circumstances of *Jára Cimrman's* creation and development, we must necessarily also cover the related issues of hero and leader worship, and the cult of personality that connects these to *Cimrman*.

Jára Cimrman is a humoristic phenomenon, and the theatre from which this character arose itself performs comedies. Therefore we will look closely at the type of humour used in *Svěrák* and *Smoljak's* plays. As this phenomenon is widely known and loved in the Czech republic, we will also try to find out precisely what it is that makes this theatre so attractive for Czech audiences in particular, and which aspects of Czech culture, history and stereotypes are appealed to by the literary duo in their legendary *Cimrman* theatre.

² Medvedev, R.A., *Problems in the literary biography of Mikhail Sholokhov*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 14

1 A Short History of Mystification, Hoaxes and Frauds in European Literature and Culture

When judging whether something is a forgery and whether a crime was committed in the process of its creation, one has to look closely at the motive. Motive appears to be the best criteria by which to check for forgery. It can also happen that fraud was not intended at all, for example "an object which started off as perfectly genuine, a pious imitation perhaps of another object, becomes, with the passage of time, the subject of deliberate fraud, so that when one is talking about forgery or non-forgery one has a complicating time continuum to consider."³ Announcing the discovery of an old document prepared in reality by the "discoverer" himself makes the motive quite visible, especially when mystification was prepared as a genuine source to support some theories or ideas. As we will see below, motives in mystification have varied greatly through the ages.

1.1 The Ancient World

Literary forgeries have a very long and distinguished history. The oldest ones known today were created in the fourth century B.C. when the Hellenic cities and temples wanted to give proof of their noble past and exceptional forefathers. Anthony Grafton sees it as a first change in the rules of perception of literary work: "Literary traditions were transformed in Hellenistic times in ways favourable to the production of good fakes. By then the principle had been established that a literary work was the product of a specific individual with a distinctive style and set of concerns."⁴ There were also slightly different hoaxes,

³ Barker, N., *The forgery of printed documents*, (in:) *Fakes and Frauds. Varieties of deception in print and manuscript*, edited by Robin Myers and Michael Harris, Detroit 1989, p.109

⁴ Grafton, A., *Forgers and Critics. Creativity and duplicity in Western scholarship*, New Jersey 1990, pp.10-11

produced as excellent pastiches, which were later on taken as originals. A very popular exercise in many schools of rhetoric was to prepare a parody of the style of some famous writer, often in the form of a private letter. Once they came into circulation they were very often considered to be originals. Mystification which was supposed to be a joke became a forgery.

In third and second centuries B.C. when libraries were starting to be established, and the availability of books was smaller than the need for them. This resulted in the creation of many forgeries when, for example the Alexandrian library deliberately employed people who were able to imitate the classics of older Greek literature.⁵ It could even be argued that the appearance of written civilisation was a direct cause for the beginning of mystification and hoaxes on a larger scale. In Greece it was very popular for small sects and groups such as the Orphics or the Pythagoreans to follow certain ancient text of some very noble founder. If new sects wanted to attract followers, they needed to reveal some extraordinary piece of work. Often there was intense competition between those sects, and therefore spiritual and intellectual authority had to be exceptional, and necessarily came from a recognisable source. The other thing was to have proof for certain dogmas and customs, for example in an early Christianity. Here, living authority was not enough, and very often it required strong support in a written form. All the scenarios mentioned above created even more opportunities for forgers. Anthony Grafton concludes by remarking that

"in this world of competing traditions and revelations, documentary authority of apparently sacred character became clothed with a glamour it had lacked in Greece in earlier times. A revelation of sufficient age, authority and historical distance could seem to be the genuine commands and techniques of divinity. A text written in the first person and ascribed to a divine figure, one of his human companions, or an authoritative interpreter of his teachings carried a powerful guarantee of the importance and validity of its contents – one that no text by an ordinary author could rival. It could offer a detailed pattern for

⁵ *Fakes and frauds. Varieties of deception in print and manuscript*, edited by Meyers, R., and Harris, M., Detroit 1989

worship and day-to-day conduct alike, thus carrying out a variety of functions that no epic, tragedy, or historical inscription could fulfil."⁶

The leaders of the time were very much aware of this, and thus they put a lot of effort into "discovering" such documents. Christians were producing large numbers of letters, like the *Pastoral Epistles* to Timothy and Titus or even "Apostolic Constitutions" for the purpose of solving disputes about certain dogmas, doctrines or practices.

1.2 The Middle Ages

In The Middle Ages another opportunity came for forgers when people started to look for their national identity and desired an adequate noble past. Creativity in this matter had almost no limits. Many families looking for their origins tried "to fill with imagination the gaps that separated the heroic Trojans of medieval epic and legend from their noble descendants in France, England and elsewhere. This tradition was to last until the very end of the Middle Ages, when Johannes Trithemius, himself a notable creator of mythical texts and rulers, complained that everyone was trying to find himself a Trojan ancestor 'as if there were no peoples in Europe before the fall of Troy, and as if the Trojans included no rascals."⁷

Beside those practices, the Middle Ages saw growth in the production of fake documents by lawyers and clerics, usually with the aim of proving the ownership of certain property or objects like sacred relics. The most famous one was *Donation of Constantine* – the story tale about the emperor who in an act of gratitude after being miraculously cured from leprosy submitted his Western empire to the Church. As Grafton has suggested, even in Gratian's *Decretum*, this basic code of canon law, there are around five hundreds faked legal texts.

The extent to which forgeries were popular in the Middle Ages is clearly demonstrated by the seventeenth century scholar Jean Hardouin, who

⁶ Grafton, A., op. cit., pp.14-15

summarised his research in a statement that claimed that the whole of Greek and Roman great literature, and even ancient coins were forged by Benedictine monks.⁸ Of course such an opinion could be seen to be extreme, but it nevertheless illustrates certain tendencies significant for the Middle Ages.

1.3 The Renaissance

In the Renaissance, the Ancient World and its culture came under the scrutiny of scholars and writers, and thus literary forgery started to be popular once again. The art of forgery was now pursued for a variety of reasons. On the one hand, many of the forgers merely worked on the understanding that such a discovery could lead to great fame and fortune. On the other hand, however, many were more ambitious and used the essentially artistic medium of forgery to give proof of their ability to be taken for a great master of the Ancient World. Such blatant self-flattery was especially prevalent in situations where the finding of a lost masterpiece was eagerly anticipated.⁹

Often the discovery of a mystification is a heavy shock, especially if such hoaxes existed legitimately in literature for centuries among the great literature that it mimicked and other authentic sources. Those which were very well prepared could be discovered only many years later. In the Renaissance, discoveries of antique documents were so popular that some people decided to make forgeries in order to gain respect or to prove their theory about ancient times. For example, a well known correspondence between Brutus and Cicero was believed too to be an authentic antique from its discovery in the Italian Renaissance till 1742.¹⁰ Similarly the *Dares and Dictys*, only turned out much later to be not eye witnesses of the Trojan Wars, but rather the product of a much later time. The same is true for completely false letters of the ancient Sicilian tyrant Phalaris, as

⁷ Grafton, A., op. cit., p.23

⁸ see also Boese, A., *Nieznane archiwa mistyfikacji. Kolekcja oszustw, fałszerstw, kawałów i kłamstw – od średniowiecza do XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2003, p.18

⁹ Grafton, A., op. cit., pp.26 & 28

well as the sixteenth century poem *Consolatio* presented as Cicero's work.¹¹ One of the most famous forgers of the Renaissance was Annius of Viterbo, author of such fake as *Lost History of Berosus of Babylon*.¹² All of the above are just a few examples of whole variety of 16th century forgeries designed to present the ancient world in a way that would support a particular modern view of the ancient world that their creator sought to promote or reinforce. Of course not only lay scholars were able to use such solutions, also monks and priests "discovered" many documents¹³.

1.4 The Modern World

The centuries following the Renaissance brought another reason for forgeries – a strong drive for professional or personal gain. Despite this increase in a more self-centred approach to forgery, many continued to fake for very idealistic reasons. An example of this is where forgers tried to bring about agreement between different Christian groups by proving that the whole body of Christian teachings comes from one source, and that only misinterpretation divides followers. As example of this are the fragments of text ascribed to Irenaeus, which were found by Christopher Matthäus Pfaff.¹⁴ Very similar forgeries were committed by even more famous scholars like Erasmus. For example "*De Duplici Martyrio* is not Erasmus' discovery but his composition; it marks an effort to find the support of the early Church for his theology at the cost – which he elsewhere insisted must never be paid – of falsifying the records of that Church. Thus the greatest patristic scholar of the sixteenth century forged a major patristic work. Erasmus was not the only grave and learned gentleman to hoax the entire world of learning with an uncharacteristic piece of fakery."¹⁵ Despite this piercing

¹⁰ Levine, J.M., *Et tu Brute? History and Forgery in 18th century England*, (in:) *Fakes and Frauds. Varieties of deception in print and manuscript*, edited by Robin Myers and Michael Harris, Detroit 1989

¹¹ Grafton, A., op.cit., p.73

¹² Levine, J.M., op. cit.

¹³ see also Levine, J.M., op. cit.

¹⁴ Groom, N., *The Forger's Shadow: How Forgery Changed the Course of Literature*. London 2002

¹⁵ Grafton, A., op. cit., p.45

analysis of Erasmus' forgery, Grafton nevertheless agrees with the "obvious idealistic justification" behind it.¹⁶

Since the seventeenth century, when the need for defining and proving national identity arose, another type of forgery flourished. Now the most coveted ones were no longer ancient texts in ancient languages, but rather ancient texts written in the national language. Opportunities for forgers to fill the gaps in national histories arose with the quest to find great literary masterpieces of the nation's forefathers¹⁷. Forgers provided "full-blown romantic emotions not mirrored by the classics (...) with ancient inspiration of a novel sort."¹⁸ Perhaps the most famous of these is James Macpherson's *Ossian Poems*.¹⁹ In accordance with the taste of the times, the new role of a novel was to give a "close, detailed observation of human actions in political or personal crisis gained the appearance of drama and veracity by representing themselves as bundles of documents discovered and assembled by objective, learned editors."²⁰ This kind of forgery was very popular in the nineteenth century and includes such famous pieces like Czech manuscripts, which we will focus on below. Before that, however, we will look at some of the specific aspects of mystifications.

Such forgeries were by no means unique or exceptional in nineteenth century Europe, nevertheless an investigation of their background and origin reveals many interesting aspects of the role of mystification in their own culture, as well as in all cultures more generally.

¹⁶ Ibid., p.45

¹⁷ Allen, P., *Fingal's Cave, the Poems of Ossian and Celtic Christianity*, New York 1977

¹⁸ Grafton, A. op. cit., p.32

¹⁹ *The construction of authorship. Textual appropriation in law and literature*, edited by M. Woodmansee and Jaszi, P., London 1994, pp.15-28

²⁰ Grafton, A., *op. cit.*, p. 34

2 Mystification: categories, characteristics, and approaches

2.1 The motivation behind mystification

As we have seen, there are different types of hoaxes. Some of them are clear forgeries that are considered crimes, made to gain a profit; the others are more innocent, like plagiarism, that in ancient Greece for example was seen as mastering the skills by getting as close as possible to the masterpiece of a certain style. Others, in the Middle Ages for example, were created to support certain doctrines or customs, which were considered valuable but which lack authority without the "discovery" of some ancient documents to support them. The motive here is less materialistic and more idealistic.

Sometimes an innocent joke designed to entertain a group of people would become a mystification on a much bigger scale than creators had ever expected. One of such mystification could be Orson Welles' radio programme which caused unexpected mass panic.²¹ Other mystification were treated very seriously and ended tragically when the disgraced author committed suicide. Such was the case with Chatterton, who faked histories, poems and drawings of ancient Bristol, and thereby achieved fame and became publishable. There are also cases where mystification was made out of hatred: for instance John Payne Collier, the nineteenth century authority on the early history of English drama, who lost his position after his rivals revealed that texts discovered by him were faked and ascribed the authorship of those forgeries to him. Although Collier was in fact the innocent victim of vicious intrigue and conspiracy against him, he never managed to regain his lost authority.²²

²¹ For more information about the radio programme by Orson Welles see section 4.2

²² Grafton, A., *op. cit.*

2.2 Categories of mystification

A very interesting approach to mystification is given by Alex Boese in his book *The Museum of Hoaxes*, in which he considers mystification as an intentional act designed to fool as many people as possible. The most important thing here is how many people will show an interest in certain mystification. This definition differentiates mystification from other types of forgery such as trickery, pranks, urban myths, and fairytales.²³

For Boese mystification is different from trickery in that it is not designed to be financially profitable. But at the same time, trickery can become mystification if somehow it would influence a large number of people. Here he gives examples of two huge paper stock forgeries – one from 1814, the other from 2000. For Boese, the only way to distinguish mystification from other types of forgery is to check how many people were influenced by this, i.e. to see if the hoax had a large number of "victims". Therefore for Boese mystification today is mainly false information distributed in media such as television and newspapers; the internet is for him the greatest of all source of misinformation. Urban tales are false stories that often circulate via electronic mail and they are perceived by him as non-intentional (those who distribute them very often believe in them) therefore they are opposed to mystification whose authors plan to trick the audience. To summarise, for Boese mystification is based on two characteristic qualities: firstly it is an intended hoax, and secondly it influences a large number of people, often via media. Such a definition is very broad but allows us to omit many cases of hoaxes that according to this definition are simple crime, innocent gossip, or just a joke.

Although all the varieties of forgery that were mentioned above are very similar to each other and sometimes it is very difficult to see the clear difference between them, all of the examples given by Boese are instances of one-time mystification,

²³ Boese, A., op.cit.

meaning that after they are unveiled, their purpose vanishes. Although they were famous and fooled large numbers of people they have never continued for a long time and once they were uncovered – they were immediately terminated.

2.3 Mystified authorship

Perhaps the most common form of mystification is the deliberate use of a pen-name so as to create better conditions for the acceptance of a certain piece of work. This was used very often by women, who, in order to gain the attention of a serious audience, would sign their work as men. Polish literature provides several good examples of this: Maria Sadowska was published as Zbigniew; Maria Czarnowska as Jerzy Horwat and the translator for the Polish edition of Franz Kafka's *Der Process* – Jozefina Szelinska – asked her fiancée Bruno Schulz to sign the translation in order for it to be accepted by the publishing office.²⁴

Sometimes the fake name was intended to sound more noble or sophisticated through using different spelling or by deriving surname from aristocratic names. Rejment became Reymont; Sedlaczek became Zorian; and Smaciarz became Orkan. The same occurred in reverse, as: merely the sound of the surname could attract a wider audience. For example surnames generated from names of objects or professions were perceived as "less noble" than the more abstract ones. Very often political circumstances were the reasons for using pen names – to avoid repressive measures or a ban on official publication.

In occupied countries during the Second World War, pen-names were used to protect the author's life and to confuse the enemy. However, not only political issues made the authors wish to hide their real identity. The true author may also have perceived his work as being inappropriate with regards to his position in society or his position of authority. Therefore many politicians, famous professors or writers would use pen-names. Henryk Sienkiewicz, for example, signed the translation of Romain Rolland's book *Jean Christof* himself, even

though his daughter has translated it; he considered the book to be highly inappropriate for young noble ladies. There are also some very interesting examples of authors who used more than one pen-name: Kazimierz Bartoszewicz had almost seventy different ones such as Boruta Warszawski or Wicek Socjalik. One remaining example of false authorship deserves mention: those instances where several authors signed as a one. It is quite true that the majority of authorship mystification took place to protect the author(s) from adverse political conditions, and so to avoid persecution or even execution.

2.4 Alleged mystifications

This is a common issue that usually arises in connection with works where there is some question as to its true authorship. A seminal example of alleged mystification from the beginning of twentieth century literature is Alfred Jarry's *Ubu King*. There are doubts as to whether or not he is the author of the play. In 1921, a former pupil from Alfred Jarry's high school, Charles Chassé, published a book in which he maintained that the most famous of Jarry's plays was plagiarised from what was originally a schoolboy farce: *Les Polonais*. The real author (so Chassé claimed) was another former pupil from the same high school: Charles Morin. Chassé suggested that the great success of the play at its 1896 premiere in Paris was based on a great hoax, and that the ensuing enthusiasm for the whole symbolist generation was merely proof of just how frivolous the entire movement actually was.

It is true that in the winter of 1888/89, Jarry and Henri Morin (Charles Morin's brother and Jarry's best friend) had been working on the play together. According to Keith Beaumont's research²⁵ there is evidence that shows, however, that more than fifty percent of the play (including the title) was created by Jarry himself. The *Ubu King* is 'in the fullest sense the product of schoolboy collaboration, an authentic product of a collective schoolboy imagination. It was

²⁴ Henryk Markiewicz, *Zabawy literackie dawne i nowe*, Kraków 2003, p.53

²⁵ Beaumont, K., *Alfred Jarry. A critical and biographical study*, Leicester University Press 1984

Jarry alone who was responsible for saving the play along with other elements of the Hébert saga²⁶, from the oblivion into which it, Hébert, the Morin brothers, and possibly even Chassé, would otherwise have fallen.²⁷ Alfred Jarry alone realised the potential hidden in the schoolboy farce. He modified it, adapted it to be a stage play, and invented the name Ubu. Although the precise extent of Jarry's involvement in creating the play will never be known, it is he who is considered by posterity to be the real author.

Another very interesting example of alleged mystification that illustrates the uncertainty that can surround such cases is the question surrounding the actual authorship of a famous Russian novel *The Quiet Don*. A theory of co-authorship is currently being considered with relation to the author Fyodor Kryukov. Roy A. Medvedev has studied this issue closely in his book *Problems in the Literary Biography of Mikhail Sholokhov*. A topic such as this is always very interesting, especially when it concerns the author's most important, most famous and most valuable piece of work. This is a novel of extraordinary power and has been described by Medvedev as being one of the most popular in the former USSR. At the time the novel first appeared, Sholokhov was only twenty three – less mature in years than one would perhaps expect the author of such an epic work to be. As Roy A. Medvedev has put it,

“sometimes readers of the first volume of the epic are surprised that Sholokhov, who was under age in 1914-18 and never visited the front line in the Imperialist war, should have described battle incidents of that time with such verisimilitude, detail and exactness. (...) How could Sholokhov, who was not an eye-witness, have re-created with such truth-to-life the experience of the people in that front line, their moods, the rout of the army and all the rest?”²⁸

What is more the young author worked for little over a year on the first part of the novel, spent less than one year on the second, and not much longer on the third. His piece of work has even, on occasion, been compared with Alexey Tolstoy's epic trilogy *The Ordeal* on which its experienced author spent a lengthy

²⁶ For more information see section 4.1

²⁷ Ibid., p.17

twenty-two years. Of course the history of literature knows of cases where a genius author wrote his masterpiece in a matter of days – for example Pushkin and his *Poltava*, or his narrative poem *Count Nulin*. As Medvedev recalls when he looks ever closer at Sholokhov's life and education, the author of *The Quiet Don* grew up deep in the provinces of Imperial Russia, and was forced to end his education at the age of thirteen. At the same time, his book evidences a vast quantity of literary erudition.

When doubts about his authorship arose, a meeting was organised between Sholokhov and Maxim Gorky, so that the latter could assure himself of the former's talent. As Medvedev notes, "Gorky was taken aback not only by youthfulness of Sholokhov but by his obvious narrow-mindedness and timidity. Talking to Gorky, Sholokhov was shy and embarrassed, answering Gorky's questions with monosyllabic, inexpressive phrases."²⁹ Later, Sholokhov refused to present his manuscript to the Special Commission that was set up to investigate whether or not he was the real author of the novel. What is more, the book differs so much from the other books of the time in its description of the Revolution that it seems strange not only that it was allowed to be published, but even stranger that it was described as one of the greatest achievements of 'Socialist Realism.' Serious historical works of that time paint a very different view of the Revolution of Don Cossacks.

When it comes to a hoax or plagiarism of such magnitude, the question is always for what reason and with what intention it was prepared. Was it just the young writer's lust for fame and respect? One must be very careful with one's judgement for as long as the issue is not irrevocably proven. Another hypothesis suggests that he was essentially the co-author, and simply participated in completing an unfinished novel which he had found. Despite all the research done by Medvedev, there remain a few people such as (most notably)

²⁸ Medvedev, R.A., op.cit, p.3

²⁹ Ibid., p.16

Solzhenitsyn, for whom Sholokhov never ceased to be considered as the real author of *The Quite Don*.³⁰

The above examples illustrate the degree to which arguments as to true authorship can be highly divisive. In some cases, time and advanced technologies are able to help to solve the problem, but sometimes uncertainties remain throughout centuries.

³⁰ Ibid. pp.64-95

3 Mystified manuscripts and their role

3.1 *The Poems of Ossian, the Manuscript of Dvůr Králové and the Manuscript of Zelená Hora*

It seems that there are so many and such different types of frauds, fakes, and hoaxes, that it is hardly possible to find a simple unified classification for all of them. As we have seen, the art of forgery has blossomed since ancient times and every century has brought some new category of it. Therefore after this short overview showing complexity of the mystification problem this dissertation will focus mainly on the two types: one that came from innocent joke or from the beginning were designed to be discovered and second: fakes made in order to fill the gap in history of literature and prove the greatness of national literary achievements of the past. We try to answer the questions: in which way those two types of mystification are significant in Czech literature, whether Czech national revival in 19th century would be fully possible without Hanka's forgery and how these hoaxed manuscripts are connected with *Jára Cimrman Theatre*.

Jára Cimrman is not the first example of such a broad mystification which the Czech nation has seen over the past centuries. Definitely the most important mystifications in Czech culture is called the *Manuscript of Dvůr Králové* and *Manuscript of Zelená Hora*. Both MSS were meant to be thirteenth century collection of poems and tales. They were intended to help raise Czech patriots despite the overwhelming German culture, and were discovered allegedly in a tower of local church. The way the MSS were made was suspicious from the very beginning in terms of the both, the material that was used, and the language that was supposed to imitate medieval Czech language. Despite these doubts for almost a century they were strongly believed to be real by many people, including many academics.³¹ Even today some historians consider the MSS to be

³¹ see also Magnuszewski, J., *Historia literatury czeskiej. Zarys*, Wrocław 1973, pp.112 - 122

genuine. According to Alois Šembera, one needed a lot of idealism and consistency to actually perceive MSS as real.³² Generally one of the strongest voices against their authenticity belonged to Tomáš Masaryk.³³ Despite the fact that they were eventually proven to be mystification at the end of nineteenth century, their role in the development of Czech culture was still very significant.

Over the centuries, literature has had many different roles, from being a servant of certain political or religious ideas to being completely ambivalent, though any literary masterpiece is necessarily the product of certain trends and is very often influenced more or less by the political and economic situation of the time. When talking about Hanka's forged manuscripts it is not possible to omit the *Poems of Ossian*, one of the biggest literary forgeries of all times; in many dictionaries it is given as a first if not the only example of literary mystification.³⁴ Although Macpherson's mystification was discovered almost immediately by the English scholar Samuel Johnson it was very enthusiastically welcomed in Europe and initiated a new romantic trend, which was in many ways similar to eighteenth century's sentimentalism. Since then many writers and poets followed his path by creating works which apotheosise and worshipped the past, idealise past heroes and warriors, perceiving them as persons of integrity and honour. Those works even included Ossian-like characters, such as eye-witnessing bard, if not Ossian himself. Everything was set in wild landscape of Northern countries. *Poems of Ossian* fuelled the later Romantic fascination with folklore³⁵.

Following this trend, Václav Hanka created and announced in 1817 the most famous Czech mystification – the Dvůr Králové manuscripts. Similar to James MacPherson's work, it influenced new trends in literature as well as the new

³² Šembera, A.V., *Libušin Soud Domnělá Nejstarší Památka Řeči České Jest Podvržen Těž Zlomek Evangelium Sv. Jana*, Vídeň, 1879

³³ Svoboda, J., *Z oboru tvorby. Kapitoly z české literatury*, Ostrava 1998, p. 41-47

³⁴ see for example: *Słownik gatunków literackich*, Bernacki, M., Pawlus, M., Bielsko-Biała 2005, p. 394, Žak, S., *Słownik. Kierunki – Szkoły – Terminy literackie*, Kielce 1998, p.176

³⁵ see also Allen, P.M., *Fingal's Cave, the poems of Ossian and Celtic Christianity*, New York 1999

perception of culture and art. Revealing their fake nature did not stop people from seeing them as the foundation for new trends and philosophy. Both MacPherson's and Hanka's works were genial as such. Therefore they become broadly accepted. In many ways, this is an example analogous to the phenomenon of Jára Cimrman. Firstly, as a parody of this type of accepted hoax, Jára Cimrman mystification 'wants' to be discovered; actually, through revealing it, one enjoys it more and could even actively take part in it.

The Czech manuscripts were developed on the basis of pro-Slavonic and anti-German tendencies popular in nineteenth centuries Slavonic countries that had been hitherto suppressed by German dynasties. Craving for independence and seeking support for contemporary ideas in past times thus exerted a strong influence on nineteenth century literature. Writers were very much inspired by everything what was significant for the so-called "Slavonic spirit". Suddenly the Slavonic past was the focus of most writers and scholars. In nineteenth century society, national identity has not fully flourished, yet the drive to discover noble Slavonic forefathers was very strong. Some parts of society preferred to dream about past greatness than to really fight for independence. The others saw in the past a clear motivation for more uprisings in order to save Slavonic nations. In such circumstances poetry always played a significant role.

3.2 The audience of mystification

At this stage of the research, it is prudent to clarify some questions concerning the audience of the mystification. Firstly, we must ask who the public was to which a certain hoax was directed; secondly, how the work was really perceived by that audience; and thirdly, what sort of public takes such a hoax seriously. There are hoaxes designed simply to fool the public, such as the *Ceremony of Washing White Lions*, or the *Spaghetti Farm* hoax. The authorship of such hoaxes also raises some very interesting points. Most of the mentioned hoaxes, especially the television and radio ones, had a so-called collaborative authorship.

How to distinguish between false and true information is also a very interesting question, which we will look at briefly. Sometimes it is enough to be well educated and well informed to locate the hoax, but this changes when the information is on an unknown subject, such as the fables that Eskimos have at least eight words for snow, or that scientists from Harvard-Smithsonian Centre for Astrophysics froze light waves, thus managing to stop light. The first however, was proven to be false, and the second despite sounding like science-fiction is confirmed to be the true.³⁶

In Boese's opinion, democratic societies offer more opportunities for mystification, but at the same time they have developed more means to uncover many hoaxes. This is because public opinion is more important in democratic societies than anywhere else. As long as lies are sensational and entertain the audience, many people prefer them to boring daily life. Both mystification and its uncovering are welcomed by democratic audience. For Boese, freedom of speech combined with the availability of information sources increase the danger of more mystification being created nowadays than ever before. The Medieval audiences, on the other hand, believed most incredible stories. Some were believed for ages, and in a few cases it is still not clear to what extent they were hoaxes. An example of such mystification was Johanna, the female pope.³⁷

Another kind of hoax often appears in relation to supposedly "sacred" relics. The medieval relic market exceeded any real amount of relics. As relics attracted hundreds of believers as an audience, they were very desirable objects. One can imagine what an opportunity such a situation creates for potential forgers. Among the relics available on the medieval market one could easily find even milk of Saint Maria, brain of Saint Peter, or even Christ's prepuce (foreskin). Some of them seemed more likely to be an original, such as the shroud of Turin,

³⁶ See also: Boese, A., *Nieznane archiwa mistyfikacji. Kolekcja oszustw, fałszerstw, kawałów i kłamstw – od średniowiecza do XXI wieku*, Warszawa 2003 pp. 9-11 and 173-176

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.64

and yet its origins remain controversial, with a 1982 scientific examination estimating that it comes from fourteenth century.

In the Enlightenment, mystification was frequently used for educational purposes.³⁸ Very often scholars who wanted to open the minds of common people (their audience in this case), and thus decided to use satire or mystification that could be easily uncovered, and which ridiculed superstitions or the lack of knowledge of a huge part of society. The cult of science ridiculed everything that was mysterious and in opposition to reason, experience and causality. Scientific experience was more or less open to the public, and people were asked not to blindly believe in something, but rather to check everything themselves, and to widen their perspectives through education. The development and education of a society was one of the most important values of this age. The accessibility of information was the most important means of education for eighteenth century society. Ridiculing or satirising a lack of education seemed to be one of the most skilful means of the Enlightenment because it was the very abolition of mystical beliefs that the Enlightenment held as its highest value. Therefore writers and scholars started to publish incredible stories about adventures which were supposed to operate as an educational parallel. The most popular method was to attract as wide an audience as possible by unbelievable stories and then to uncover the mystification. Of course this was not the only kind of mystification in the Enlightenment although it certainly was one of the most significant kinds for this time. After the eighteenth century this kind of humorous mystification began to be more popular – mocking a large number of people is used frequently in advertising for example.

Jonathan Swift and Daniel Defoe created one of the most popular hoaxes at those times – the extraordinary adventures described by two eyewitnesses Robinson Crusoe and Gulliver. Their commentaries were analogies to situation prevalent in English society, its problems, and shortcomings. Aside from *Adventures of*

³⁸ Groom, N., *The forger's shadow: how forgery changed the course of literature*, London 2002

Gulliver, Jonathan Swift created many other works in a similar kind such as the essay entitled: *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People in Ireland from Being a Burden to Their Parents or Country*. By proposing that rich people consume children born into poverty, he actually exposed the lack of compassion which dominated and defined the wealthier layers of society.

4 Collective mystifications

We will now look at different kinds of collective mystification. By “collective mystification” are meant those instances where the authorship is restricted not to one individual, but rather to a group of people. This concept also extends in instances where the mystification develops beyond the influence of the original creators. We will look not only at literary aspects of mystification but also at the broader cultural aspects that can, in some cases, cause a mystification to prosper once it has been discovered, in contrast to the more typical kind that expires upon discovery. Such examples of mystification are in many ways related to those that exist in our culture for centuries, namely folklore ones such as Santa Claus or Easter Bunny. In those cases, stories about them are well known, and most of us believe them until a certain age, but discovery does not mean that the mystification is over; rather we pass these stories on to our children. This is a very specific kind of mystification in which everybody knows that the characters do not exist, but people willingly participate in creating further stories about them. Such participation becomes a part of our culture, and develops a kind of myth that lives on. Of course both of listed cases, Santa Claus and Eater Bunny, are a mix of religious beliefs and folklore³⁹ and yet this type of mystification is still close to examples of the mystification like Jára Cimrman or the College of Pataphysics⁴⁰. Although they do not influence as broad section of the public and

³⁹ Šalanda, B., *Foklór, tradice a stereotypy*, Univerzita Karlova, Praha 1990, pp.8-9

⁴⁰ For more information on College of Pataphysics, see the next section 4.1;

are not an integral part of our culture, they nevertheless do not end in the moment of unmasking, and once discovered they offer the possibility for more than just original author to participate in them.

4.1 Dada, Doctor Faustroll, and Pataphysics

The Dada movement influenced modern literature and culture from the beginning of the twentieth century. One of the Dadaist founders, Alfred Jarry, created a mystification that is alive till today, even if it is not known broadly: pataphysics. Created from the beginning with a whole system of values, with entirely specific views on life and art, this was supposedly the science that was a manifestation of the surrealists' philosophy. The term was used for the first time by Alfred Jarry in his article "Guignol" on 28th of April 1893 in *L'Echo de Paris litteraire illustré*. According to Jarry's later definition, pataphysics was "the science of imaginary solutions, which symbolically attributes the properties of objects, described by their virtuality, to their lineaments."⁴¹ The core book about the whole pataphysician construct and its "founder", Dr Faustroll, was only published in its entirety four years after Jarry's death. Until 1911 only very few aspects of them had been distributed by contemporary publishers. The theory itself could never solicit as much attention as a noble individual such as Dr Faustroll could.

The story of how a famous (yet never existent) pataphysician came into being is a very interesting one. Both of Jarry's famous characters - Dr Faustroll and Ubu - were modelled on a former teacher of Jarry's - physics master Felix Hébert, known as M. Hébert. "M. Hébert was in the habit of invoking his 'science en physique', which became rapidly transformed into 'science de pataphysique' - a science which seems to have given (...) the power to act upon phenomena in a peremptory and miraculous way, and even have constituted an occult or magical source of knowledge."⁴² The whole science of pataphysics was based on a schoolboy concept which became a solid base for the Dada movement. "Dada aimed to destroy the reasonable deceptions of man and recover the natural and unreasonable order. Dada wanted to replace the logical nonsense of the men of

⁴¹ *Gestes and opinions du Docteur Faustroll, II*, (in:) <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pataphysics>

today by the illogically senseless."⁴³ The schoolboy concept combined with serious existential questions became the very foundation of the Dadaist movement.

The dawn of a new century always comes with a thrill of the unknown and the unexpected. The beginning of 20th century was a time of many new and significant inventions, along with a more profound questioning of the basics of physics. Some truths, once fundamental, were not held to be true anymore, but at the same time science began to make possible that which had previously been far beyond imagination. New inventions needed new words and new expressions, and so the development of the sciences also influenced languages. Artists and other great thinkers were aware that changes were happening faster and were revolutionising daily life. This combination of factors raised many fundamental existential questions. Grossman has succinctly summarised this as follows:

"The Dada revolt against language and logic followed on the heels of a sharp and widespread reaction against applied science and its mundane vision of the world. In the eyes of many modern thinkers, science had become little more than what Paul Valéry has termed a set of successful recipes. What good were its marvellous inventions such as wireless telegraphy, the motorcar, the flying machine, and the moving picture, if they resulted in such spiritual impoverishment? Led on by Max Planck and Albert Einstein who attacked Newtonian physics and advanced concepts of time and space, these thinkers began to question the conventional reality which formed the basis for all of this supposed 'progress'. Epistemologists postulated new conditions for knowledge, psychologists explored the unconscious mind, and mathematicians devised non Euclidian geometries."⁴⁴

This was the background to the Dada movement, and the conditions were thus perfect for the development of a completely new science – Pataphysics. This precondition was especially suitable when one considers that "the current of irrationalism, which developed in the wake these widespread reactions against

⁴² Beaumont, K., op. cit., p.188

⁴³ Grossman, M.L., *Dada. Paradox, Mystification and Ambiguity in European Literature*, New York 1977, p. xiii

⁴⁴ Grossman, M.L., op. cit., p. 19

reason, was electrified by World War I and the resultant breakdown of established values. In the arts in general and poetry in particular, the revolt, which had been more or less submerged, broke through to the surface. Following Jarry's example, disillusioned young writers began to question even the most basic aspects of human existence. If a man's life must culminate in the blood and horror of a war like this, they asked, how worthwhile can it be? It was out of this kind of questioning that the Dada movement developed."⁴⁵ The amazing progress which had led to the creation of deadly weapons provoked many thinkers into questioning the meaning of science and the meaning of rationalism. Irrationalism and absurdity seemed to be the best answers that for Dadaists, which has culminated in Pataphysics and its fictional inventor – Doctor Faustroll.

The whole life of Doctor Faustroll was in itself very 'pataphysical'. He "was born in Circassia, in 1898 (the twentieth century was -2 years old), at the age of sixty-three. At that age, which he retained all his life, Doctor Faustroll was a man of medium height, namely, to be absolutely accurate, of $8 \times 10^{10} + 10^9 + 4 \times 10^8 + 5 \times 10^6$ atomic diameters."⁴⁶ The description continues in a similar way, for example: "his eyes, two capsules of ordinary writing ink, prepared in the same way as Danzing schnapps, with the addition of golden spermatozoa."⁴⁷

Dr Faustroll, much like Goethe's Faust, goes through different adventures in order to find the truth, to experience the purity of existence. But Jarry's character's adventures are followed by amazing inventions that are "milestones" in the sciences. Furthermore, he is even responsible for universal annihilation. In the end, Faustroll himself dies as a last stage of the whole destruction. His secret knowledge is thus not secret anymore. The character of Panmuphle continues his research beyond the physical world and gives a wide view of the science of pataphysics by recalling two of Faustroll's letters to physicist Lord Kelvin – these

⁴⁵ Grossman, M.L., op. cit., p. 20

⁴⁶ Beaumont, K., op. cit., p.181

cover topics from literature and the arts to speculation on scientific and philosophical matters, as well as the principles of pataphysics.

As M.L. Grossman points out, "Jarry carried the fusion of art and life far beyond anything envisioned either by Rimbaud or Oscar Wilde. In the process, he discovered an entirely new universe of the imagination: The symbol of this visionary side of Jarry's nature was Dr Faustroll, savant, pataphysician, imperturbable logician."⁴⁸

In Jarry we find the perfected fusion of rationality and absurdity. For example, Faustroll described his boat as "a large sieve which is virtually unsinkable." After describing the sieve at great length and providing minute scientific details that account for its sea worthiness, Faustroll concluded on the following note: "the skiff is not only propelled by oar blades but also by suction disks at the end of spring levers. I am all the more convinced of the excellence of my calculations and of its insubmersibility in that, as is my invariable habit, we shall not be navigating on water but on dry land."⁴⁹

The nature of pataphysics can best be described as a junction between a philosophical joke, a form of exalted mysticism, and a collective hoax; above all, it invited the author to take part in its creation. It was created on purpose to define a new system of values – the pataphysical world. As such, it was a manifestation of the 'belle époque' – a manifestation in search of a new view on the world, philosophy, literature and science. Jarry's immortal characters – originally created by schoolboy imagination – were symbolic of the destruction of the old order as symbolised by Ubu and the creation of the new one – Dr Faustroll. Ubu destroyed everything, he even removed the remaining ruins of the old system; Jarry designed him to sweep away literally everything. In contrast to this, the Dada movement itself destroyed nothing at all. They focused

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.181

⁴⁸ Grossman, M.L., op. cit., p. 23

mostly on the process of creation, and even invited spectators to their acts of creation. Therefore pataphysics became a vast “project” in which many participated, among them Noel Arnaud, Luc Étienne Périn, Raymond Queneau, Jean Genet, Boris Vian and Jean Ferry. In May 1948 the *Collège de 'pataphysique* was founded by a group of artists and writers following in the pataphysical tradition. In 2000, the *London Institute of 'Pataphysics* began its activity in promoting the absurdist concept. It is markedly institutional, and has six departments: the *Bureau for the Investigation of Subliminal Images*, the *Comittee for Hirsutism and Pogonothropy*, the *Deptartment of Dogma and Theory*, the *Department of Potassons*, the *Department of Reconstructive Archaeology* and *The Office of Patentry*.⁵⁰ Grossman summarised Dada's character by stating that "the destructive activities of the Dada movement are not so much a manifestation of nihilism in the arts as they are an expression of moral outrage by a group of disillusioned young artists and writers who realised, above all, that they must arrive at the *reductio ad absurdum* of life and art. so that they might begin anew."⁵¹

Pataphysics became a kind of theatre where the spectators themselves became the authors; everybody knew the rules and agreed to follow them. According to dramatist Eugène Scribe's description of such a theatre in 1836 it "was a place of relaxation and amusement, not for instruction or correction and what amused audience was not truth but fiction."⁵² Theatres were flooded with plays that were simply amusing and not particularly complicated. There were, of course, some serious dramas written at this time by Alexander Dumas, Emile Augier and the likes, but they were definitely in the minority.⁵³ Thus “much of the revolt which we witness in the theatre all over Europe in the closing years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth springs first and foremost quite simply from an attempt to restore to the theatre the status of a serious art

⁴⁹ Grossman, M.L., op. cit., p. 24

⁵⁰ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pataphysics>

⁵¹ Grossman, M.L., op. cit., p. 166

⁵² Beaumont, K., op. cit., p. 87

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 86

form."⁵⁴ Jarry took part in this reform by writing plays that were controversial and that demonstrated his approach to the arts and philosophy. The other tendency at those times was to emphasise the "reality" of the play - i.e. convincing the spectators that they are witnessing something real. That is why Jarry applied science, and even though it was pataphysics (a parody of science), he nevertheless used scientific tools. This led the audience to believe that the characters on the stage were real. Jarry's hoaxes have their roots in two distinct but intertwined attitudes: they were created on purpose to manifest the values of a new order, a new aesthetics, a forthcoming age; and they questioned the old approaches towards art, philosophy, literature and their role in life.

4.2 Media hoaxes

The mystification of Jára Cimrman has its origins in a radio hoax, and from the very beginning was meant to entertain people rather than to fool them. In fact media are very good source of hoaxes, even unplanned ones. Many listeners believe in what they hear, simply because the information has been given by media which is seen as an infallible source. It looks like often it does not matter that the programme was made for entertainment purposes. Some of them could even cause mass hysteria among listeners.

One of the examples of such mass hysteria is the radio programme led by George Orson Welles on 30th October 1938 when he broadcast his adaptation of H.G. Wells' science fiction novel *The War of the Worlds*.⁵⁵ The Mercury Theatre's performance was aired on Halloween Eve, and was meant to mock both radio listeners and radio itself. The broadcast was announced days before and its fictional character highlighted in the Sunday papers. Hardly anyone among the radio staff took the play seriously. Up to the last very minute the authors were

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 87

⁵⁵ Even though this example is taken from modern American culture, it is too significant an example to omit when talking about mystification. In fact, there will be four more examples of media hoaxes coming from American culture. Whilst these are thus not of „European Culture“ in the strictest definition of the term, it could nevertheless be argued that given American culture's undeniable roots in European culture, these examples are illustrative of tendencies that exist on both sides of the Atlantic.

changing the script to make the whole drama less believable. Welles and his crew failed in terms of performance as many people took it as a transmission from a scene of a Martian attack on Earth. Panic arose especially in relation with the fragment where the

"seemingly authentic newscaster described the scene at Grover's Mill. The top unscrewing. The monster emerging! It had tentacles, a bear-sized body, black serpentine eyes, V-shaped mouth from which saliva dripped! It sent out rays that made cars, barns, and people burst into flame!"⁵⁶

Even though the radio-drama was very much a science-fiction, it became a hoax that caused big panic. From the later description it seems that

"thousand of people, convinced that the Martians were coming, had already fled their homes. Some gathered in churches, others armed themselves. (...) People who lived by the Hudson River, which the Martians were supposedly crossing, reported that they had actually seen the invading monsters. Staff at the New York Herald Tribune began donning gas-masks."⁵⁷

According to a later study by Princeton University, around "two million people believed in the broadcast, typically those badly educated and/or from the Southern States."⁵⁸

The reason for such a perception could be tension present in the news at the end of year 1938, when the outbreak of war in Europe seemed only to be a matter of time. Generally the atmosphere in the media, and especially in the news, was quite nervous and tense. It was clear that the Nazis were gaining control in Europe, and United States would eventually need to become involved. The drama itself, although very futuristic, included the names of real places. Welles himself denied that he aimed to cause panic. Mass hysteria needs specific research and that is not the aim of this dissertation.

⁵⁶ Gordon, S., op.cit., p.341

⁵⁷ Ibid., p.342

⁵⁸ ibid., p.342

Another frequent source of radio or media hoaxes are transmissions connected with April Fool's Day. Since the sixteenth century the custom of playing pranks on one another on the 1st of April spread all over the world. One could find the origins of the day in 1564, when the reformed calendar of Charles IX was embraced by France, and the beginning of year was moved from 1st of April to the 1st of January. People who kept celebrating New Year in April were called April Fools.⁵⁹

One of the most famous English April Fool's Day hoaxes took place in 1860 when important London inhabitants received an official invitation "to view the annual *Ceremony of Washing the White Lions*"⁶⁰ at the White Gate of the Tower of London. Many of those invited actually appeared just to learn that neither the White Gate at the Tower of London nor the White Lions existed.

In 1966 many Britons believed in a hoax television programme led by otherwise serious BBC news presenter Richard Dimbleby. It was a presentation of a spaghetti farm on Swiss-Italian border. "'Many of you' he asserted in his rotund reliable tones 'will have seen pictures of the vast spaghetti plantations in the Po Valley.' He went on to speak about spaghetti weevil, and explained why spaghetti grows in such uniform lengths."⁶¹ Although the whole idea seemed to be very abstract but many people were assured that such a farm really exists and that spaghetti really grows on spaghetti trees. Similarly, four years later in United States of America on NBC's Huntley-Brinkley programme, another serious and respected presenter John Chancellor reported on a dill pickle tree growing on Dimbley Pickle Farm. Also this time many people immediately believed in it.⁶²

The reason that lies at the heart of the success enjoyed by so many mystifications initiated by the media can be identified in the status that such media enjoys in the public's opinion. The authoritative status enjoyed by many of the programmes' presenters and editors suggest to the audience that the information must be true. Mystification delivered in this way could only really fail if the

⁵⁹ Ibid., p.16

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.16

⁶¹ Ibid., p.16

⁶² Gordon, S., (1995), op. cit., p.16-17

audience consisted of critical, educated and generally well informed individuals. The wide audience to which many of the popular programmes are broadcast includes people with different levels of education. Such an audience will contain at once people capable of highly critical thought and others who simply believe every suggestion made to them, as long as it fits into their general worldview. As the population is generally more likely to be less intelligent than more intelligent, one could reasonably argue that the broader the audience of a certain programme, the higher the likelihood that the mystification will succeed. The expectations associated with a specific programme are also highly relevant. The more serious a programme is generally perceived to be, the more likely it is that it will succeed in initiating a mystification (whether intentionally or not).

Even though the 1st of April is broadly known as April Fool's Day, there are many people who accept hoaxes performed on this day as real. A few more examples from different decades will illustrate how, despite the passing time, people are still tricked by media jokes. On the 1st of April 1979 Capital Radio broadcast an announcement that Britain being out of clock synchronisation with other countries and around 48 hours ahead would cancel the 5th and the 12th of April, following a Government decision. The studio was flooded by calls from worried listeners who had already planned events on the 'cancelled' days.⁶³ And here is another example, this time coming from America: on the 1st of April 1985 American humorist George Plimpton wrote an article in *Sport Illustrated* about Sidd (Siddhartha) Finch, a young Englishman "who had studied mind control in a Tibetan retreat, learned to pitch a baseball at 168mph with perfect accuracy, mastered the French horn, and was testing for the New York Mets."⁶⁴ Even though his article started with a sentence: "Happy April Fool's Day", many readers again believed in it.

⁶³ Ibid., p.17

⁶⁴ Ibid., p.17

It seems that when a mystification is presented by a respectable and serious source, it is readily believed by many. From the above examples it would also appear that even tabloid news can be such a "respectable source" in certain situations. In 1990 the popular British tabloid *News of The Worlds* published an article on the 1st of April that new Channel Tunnel's halves coming from the French and English sides will not meet as planned. According to the tabloid, the reason for this was that different measures had been used by both sides: meters by the French and yards by British. Again many readers 'swallowed' the information readily.

There are surely many different examples illustrating the naivety of the public when it comes to information given by the media. One example is the *Bathtub hoax* which despite being uncovered remained in existence for at least forty years. It was not on the 1st of April but actually on the 28th of December 1917 and the article in its character was definitely a joke. *The Neglected Anniversary* was written by a journalist H.L. Mencken. In it he revealed the completely fictional *history* of bathtub and its first installation in United States during presidency of Millard Fillmore.⁶⁵ The hoax was broadly believed to be true to the extent that people were requesting more information and often used the article as a source of information, sometimes even for their academic papers. In May 1926 Mencken confessed to the mystification in his column, even though the same newspaper, *The Boston Herald*, printed the bathtub hoax article in June. Even though in July Mencken confessed the prank a second time, the story begun to live its own life. Since then over forty two times people reprinted it in newspapers and academic publications, or retold in radio programmes as a true story.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ *The Bathtub hoax and other Blasts and Bravos* by H.L. Mencken, edited with an introductory and notes by McHugh, R., New York 1958

⁶⁶ Even President Truman used this story in his speech in Philadelphia in September 1952. The MacDougall's book was published in 1958 and gives the list of recalling Mencken's story as true up to 1954. More recently over thirty five times the fictional story was used in Internet sources as well as magazines and newspapers such as *Plumbing and Mechanical Magazine* in 1987, or *The Washington Post* in December 2001. Even the confession was published under the headlines *The American Public will swallow anything*, the hoax seems to be still believed in. See also *The Bathtub hoax...op.cit.* p 5 - 9

Another very interesting one from that category is the novel by Penelope Ashe, who appeared to write the best-selling novel in America in 1970's. Her book *Naked Came the Stranger*, a story about sex in suburbia, in three days was sold in two hundred thousand copies, and around eighteen movie producers become seriously interested in buying the rights for making a movie based on this book. It had brilliant reviews. There was just one problem: nobody could find Miss Penelope Ashe. Within one week it was revealed that book was a hoax produced by Mike McGrady and twenty four other co-authors, who had worked on a chapter each, completing the whole book within three weeks. As McGrady later admitted, he wanted to check whether his idea of a perfectly written novel could be true.

In all above mentioned cases one could see that the authority of certain institutions is often enough to make people believe in what they hear, read or see. Even the most paradoxical stories when supported by media become believable for quite a big part of society. The question on the authority of the media arises. To what extent can one prevent being fooled if jokes come from different directions and present different levels of humour? Awareness and a critical mind seem to be a good solution. Gullibility has its source in a type of laziness when one does not want to check the information or in a naivety that comes from both lack of education and inability to reason. It could also come from a desire to believe without any boundaries of common sense.

4.3 The birth of Jára Cimrman

When comparing the above hoaxes with the beginning of Jára Cimrman's story in the radio show one can see that, none of those hoax programmes were continued as series, most of them were one-off jokes – once they were exposed, they were "completed" and lost their future potential.

The undiscovered genius Jára Cimrman was mentioned for the first time in the comic radio programme *Vinárna U Pavouka* (*Wine cellar At Spider's*) led by Zdeněk Svěrák and Jiří Šebánek in a programme⁶⁷ transmitted by Czechoslovak Radio on the 16th September 1966. This humorous and often highly absurd programme was also based on mystification: two gentlemen were discussing significant issues in a non-existent wine cellar, accompanied by supposedly live jazz bands which have never been to the Eastern bloc. The main goal of the programme was to ridicule the pointless talks and discussions often presented on the radio by random "specialists" on different subjects.⁶⁸ Svěrák and Šebánek skipped over the political issues of the day and instead concentrated mostly on a satire of society by presenting transmission of unbelievable events, such as the magician Merano Blažejovský hitting a wall with his head. The issues they talked about were often quite controversial and many listeners took them so seriously that they sent letters approving or strongly disapproving of the view taken on certain issues. During one such a programmes one guest, Doctor Evžen Hedvábný, revealed information about the discovery of a Czech genius by the name of Jára da Cimrman. Svěrák announced an exhibition of the naive self-taught sculptor and steamroller driver Jára Cimrman, shown in Czechoslovakia for the first time ever.⁶⁹ Unfortunately, the exhibition was prepared in an air-pavilion which burst at the very last moment so that the opening of the exhibition had to be cancelled. Apparently, as listeners could learn from the journalist, Jára Cimrman himself was present at the scene of the event and was trying desperately (and unsuccessfully) to pump up the air-pavilion. The very first appearance of the Czech genius was indeed comical but it was hardly imaginable at the time that this episode would evolve into a significant phenomenon and will last over forty years. A taste of the future fame of Jára Cimrman came on 23rd December 1966 during a discussion between Svěrák and Karel Velebný as Dr. Hedvábný. They talked for the first time about the

⁶⁷ Texts as well as a short history of the programme are available in a book by Svěrák, Z., Šebánek, J., *Vinárna U Pavouka. Výbor scénářů a textů rozhlasového pořadu*, Praha 2001

⁶⁸ Just, V., *Proměny malých scén. Rozmluvy o vývoji a současné podobě českých autorských divadel malých jevištních forem*, 1984, p. 150-158

unknown genius, and compared him to Leonardo da Vinci in that he was also a multitalented genius whose discoveries were far ahead of his time.⁷⁰ Since then during transmissions on 20th January, 17th February, 24th March, 21st April, 21st July, 15th September in year 1967; on 26th January, 26th March, 24th May in 1968; and on 23rd January, 20th March, 19th April and 6th December 1969 the mysterious life of a genius who had supposedly disappeared into oblivion, was revealed to the audience step by step. At this stage the creators did not know just how popular their hoax would become. During those two years listeners were informed on a monthly basis about UNESCO preparations to include Jára Cimrman in a world calendar of culture, or about the enormous enthusiasm for setting up Jára Cimrman fan clubs around the world.⁷¹ One could follow information about Dr. Hedvábný's research on Czech genius' letters and diaries. Every time there was a discussion about Cimrman, some new facts from his amazing life were uncovered, such as previously unknown information about his extraordinary theatre which, as listeners were informed, still existed, or his close friendship with Albert Einstein.⁷²

5 The prototype of the mystified genius - the cult of personality.

*"Leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth."*⁷³

The times in which Jára Cimrman was created were significant for Central and Eastern Europe. Despite still living under an autocratic rule, the population of

⁶⁹ Svěrák, Z., Šebánek, J., op. cit., p. 117

⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 118-120

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 154

⁷² Ibid. p. 148

⁷³ Kellerman, B., *Leadership: multidisciplinary perspectives*, New Jersey 1984, p. ix

many of these countries was nevertheless beginning to gradually experience more freedoms. Some even dared to comment publicly on the past decades and the cruelty of the authorities of the time. The political leadership in such countries as Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Romania was far removed from the democratic-sounding titles that they gave themselves. Furthermore, the imperial power of Soviet domination was a pressure constantly exerted on these subject nations, and the cult of personality that came with them was something that people were exposed to every day.⁷⁴

5.1 Political leadership and hero worship

The cult of personality plays an important role in researching leadership. Although the latter term comes from the 1950's, when Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev used it in a speech entitled *On the Personality Cult and its Consequences* soon after the death of Joseph Stalin, the phenomenon itself has its roots in ancient times. The term carries a pejorative meaning, and was linked to Stalin and his cruel and catastrophic method of dictatorial leadership. Other terms that one often comes across in the process of analysing leadership are "charismatic authority" or "hero worship." It is therefore prudent, for the sake of this enquiry, to give a brief definition of these terms, as they often find corresponding meaning in cultural leadership, a term we will look at below.

Human societies have a tendency, as Gardner has remarked, "to single out certain individuals and place them in positions of authority, and to find a justification for doing so."⁷⁵ Evidence of this tendency can be found in the earliest mythology and folklore. What was remarkable about this hero-worship was that it was generally an ex post facto occurrence, which is to say that the "hero" was only elevated to this status after having proved his value on his own, unromanticised, actions. In his book *On Heroes and Hero-worship*, Thomas Carlyle

⁷⁴ Patočka, J., *Kim są Czesi?*, Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Kraków 1997, p. 70-79

⁷⁵ *Leadership and the Cult of Personality*, edited by Gardner, J.F., London 1974, p. xi

compares the different kinds of heroes that our society is accustomed to.⁷⁶ He remarks on the rather surprising quality that many hero figures tend to have of being able to inspire a great deal of romantic sentiment in people, whilst usually and paradoxically failing to become a meaningful political leader or lawmaker.

According to Max Weber's observations on the matter, societies periodically pass through three different types of authority: the "charismatic" type - for example Christ, Muhammad, or any otherwise "inspiring" characters such as perhaps John F Kennedy or even Adolf Hitler; the "rational-legal" type - this being characterised by a sort of "routinised and bureaucratised charisma," an example of which would perhaps be the German Chancellor Angela Merkel; and the "traditional" type - where authority is "legitimised by usage, precedent and custom."⁷⁷ In the Weberian construct, these three types come around in a cycle. From a traditional background a new charismatic authority appears, which in turn may result in the rational-legal type holding sway. The cycle continues, and is an organic element of the political machine as it goes through phases of expansion, stabilisation, contraction and re-expansion. The best example of a practical application of Weber's theory was (and in a sense, is) Russia.⁷⁸

We will focus mostly on cases of the cult of personality, beginning with a look at different historical leaders. Even though the term leadership has a wider meaning, this is nevertheless a useful starting point. In ancient Egypt the pharaoh was a divine leader, the son of the highest of all gods. The consequences were very simple - the power of the ruler was absolute. The pharaoh decided on matters of life and death for all those under his rule. The leader's divinity found expression in their funeral ceremonies which suggested the immortality of the emperor and his return to the realm of gods. Also the *monos archein* - a monarch in ancient Greece was a ruler with absolute power in the name of common good. Alexander of Macedonia was increasingly worshiped as god as his absolutism

⁷⁶ Carlyle, T., *On heroes, hero worship and the heroic in history*, London 1926

⁷⁷ Burns, J.M., *Leadership*, New York 1978, p. 243

developed. Julius Caesar was perceived as demigod and popular hero. According to Plato and Aristotle, a king represented “the ruling principle of the universe”⁷⁹ and as such, a noble individual, he was almost inviolable. The cult of the ruler was established as a help to fully control the conquered nations. It was known especially in the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. Of course the power of the leader was never completely absolute – when it came to assassination the ruler status was simply not enough.

As “leadership is interpersonal, leaders cannot be seen in isolation from followers.”⁸⁰ Thus looking at the problem it might be useful to pay heed to sociological surveys made on this topic. There are different approaches towards the typology of political leaders. Lenin, Trotsky and Gandhi were surveyed by Wolfenstein⁸¹. The sociologist Laswell also gives three types of political leaders: the "Agitator" (for example, Testament prophets), the "Administrator" (Herbert Hoover), and the "Theorist" (Marx).⁸² The description of these types is as follows:

“The essential mark of the agitator is the high value which he places on the emotional response of the public...The agitator has come by his name honestly, for he is enough agitated about public policy to communicate his excitement to those about him. The administrator is tied to the members of his own environment, whose relations he seeks to co-ordinate. The administrator is a co-ordinator of effort in continuing activity. Marx, the theorist, wanted to impress himself upon mankind (...) and wanted unreserved admiration for the products of his mind. He toiled through years of isolation and poverty to make his assertion impregnable.”⁸³

James Davis Barber offers further classification. He distinguishes four kinds of leaders: "Active-positive" (relatively high self-esteem and relative success in relating to the environment – for example Truman); "Active-negative"

⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 243

⁷⁹ *Leadership and the Cult*, op.cit., p. xxi

⁸⁰ Burns, J.M., ‘Foreword’ (in:) Barbara Kellerman, *Leadership: multidisciplinary perspectives*, New Jersey 1984, p. vii

⁸¹ Kellerman, B., ‘Leadership as political act’ (in:) Barbara Kellerman, *Leadership: multidisciplinary...*, op.cit

⁸² Ibid., p.75

⁸³ Kellerman, B., ‘Leadership: multidisciplinary...’, op.cit., p. 75

(contradiction between relatively intense effort and relatively low emotional reward for that effort – for example Lyndon Johnson); "Passive-positive" (this is the receptive, compliant, other-directed character whose life is a search for affection as a reward for being agreeable and co-operative rather than personally assertive – for example Harding); and "Passive-negative" (dutiful service compensates for low self-esteem based on a sense of uselessness – Eisenhower, for example).⁸⁴

Of course these are not the only existing typologies of the political leadership, and according to James MacGregor Burns we can find around 130 definitions of the term.⁸⁵ It does not matter how many types we would create or recall, it is a personality that serves as the base for being a leader, who is more than just a figurehead politician or a marionette.

Although there are many different types of leaders (they range from Gandhi to Hitler or Stalin), they all have at least one thing in common: they are charismatic and are able to attract followers. The foundation for their ruling is the power and promises given to the masses. It has happened that when a leader gained power, he crushed the whole opposition – very often he became a tyrant like Stalin or Mao Tse-tung, for example. Their leadership was based on a revolution and was “passionate, dedicated, single-minded, ruthless, self-assured, courageous, tireless, usually humourless, and often cruel. (...) Its success rests on a powerful value system, on responsiveness to popular need, and on the systematic suppression of dissent.”⁸⁶ Original ideas were often overruled by the drive for power, though for some sociologists a leader and a tyrant are contradictory terms.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 77

⁸⁵ Burns, J.M., ‘Leadership...’, op.cit., p. 2

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 239

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 3

As we have seen, the cult of leader is synonymous with a form of subtle but pervasive mystification. Having been subject to the control of communists for many years, Czech culture created a vibrant response to this form of mystification. Interestingly, one of the principal responses also took the form of mystification as we have seen above: the phenomenon of Jára Cimrman. To further explore this aspect of leadership mystification in Czech culture, we will now further investigate the "cult of personality" and the socio-cultural response that this evoked from the Czech people. Another question is that of the circumstances – to what extent certain leader comes from a need of the moment, of collective expectations and tendencies of the whole society. Both sides, the leader and those who are led, cannot exist separately.

5.2 The Cult of personality

"A psychotic leader"⁸⁸ – this is the description applied to Stalin, Hitler or Ivan the Terrible, and it is one very often used in political psychiatry. These were all leaders "who must be chased around with nets."⁸⁹ Already in the 1920's Stalin was considered to be unsuitable for the leadership of an entire country. Even Lenin, in his *Last Will and Testament*, a short while before his death, wrote of Stalin that in

"having become General Secretary, [he] has concentrated enormous power in his hands; and I am not sure that he always knows how to use that power with sufficient caution...Stalin is too rude, and this fault, entirely supportable in relations among us Communists, becomes insupportable in relations in the office of General Secretary. Therefore, I propose to the comrades to find a way to remove Stalin from that position and appoint to it another man, who in all respects differs from Stalin only in superiority – namely, more patient, more loyal, more polite, and more attentive to comrades, less capricious."⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Renshon, S.A., 'Assessing political leaders. The criterion of *Mental Health*' (in:) Barbara Kellerman, *Leadership: multidisciplinary...*, op.cit, p. 236

⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 236

⁹⁰ Henderson, H.W., *More questions about Russia*, Glasgow 1945, p. 4

That is not the description of a perfect ruler who could lead the whole nation, but even if Lenin was concerned about Stalin, nobody saw in him the future demon he then became. Despite this opposition, Stalin became a revered leader with absolute power. At some point such a phenomenon seemed to be essential in a communist system. Anatoly Butenko explains it this way:

“In a country where a patriarchal peasantry constitutes the majority of the population (and Soviet Russia was precisely such a country when the construction of socialism began) there are peasants’ traditions, peasants’ backwardness, and peasant psychology, which, according to Marx, gravitate towards strong power, towards administrative leadership, towards worship of the patriarch.”⁹¹

The basic ideas were sometimes so irrational that they needed strong backing in the ruler who would "make them happen." The cult of personality itself was created to convince people that their leader has almost supernatural qualities and certainly absolute power; such a leader would inevitably be surrounded by followers. Starting from his promise to fulfil a collective need for a change he very often ended up completely detached from reality. As Bertrand Russell wrote about communism in the Soviet Union, "the evil came from a dogmatic belief in a universal remedy – a dogmatic belief and a universal remedy that sanctioned any brutality for the sake of attaining the goal."⁹² This "remedy" seems to be a great justification for keeping power for any price and by any means. Creating the cult of a ruler was one of these means. In the ancient world it helped to keep control over conquered nations. In a communist country this was simply part of the brainwashing ideology based on people’s drive for having a leader who supposedly knows how to obtain a better future and permanent happiness. The leader was depicted as a supernatural hero. The result of this deliberate leadership mystification was that by 1945, Stalin could confidently be described as “the world’s most absolute dictator.”⁹³ Even though he was surrounded by a large group of people, nobody seemed to know who the

⁹¹ Butenko, A., ‘To avoid mistakes in the future’ (in:) *The Stalin Phenomenon: Soviet scholars on the sources of the deviation of socialism...*, Moscow 1988, p. 10

⁹² Russell, B., ‘The error of communism’ (in:) *Myth and reality*, New York 1959, p. 51

⁹³ Henderson, H.W., op. cit., p. 11

leader really was. He was so well hidden behind thousands of portraits, statues, eulogistic articles and his own works that the real person became a fiction.

Beside this created image he had the support of a large army and a massive and efficient secret police. Education and the media became the means of control and indoctrination. In this way he controlled not only people's lives but also their minds. The regime seemed to be absolute. It started by taking private property in the name of collectivisation, and then extended its frontier to creating the way of thinking, the way of perceiving the world, and even the way of expressing it that formed the rules governing people's culture.

5.3 An unlikely similitude – Cimirman, Lenin, Stalin, Brezhnev, etc...

The co-analysis of these three individuals might seem rather strange and perhaps a little stretched on first appraisal. On further investigation, however, one finds that there are remarkable similarities that appear to exist between Cimirman the mentioned political leaders. Indeed it is the *fiction* that surrounds these people that is of interest for this investigation, and it is precisely that fiction that reveals itself to be the source of their similarity.

The death of Stalin brought about great changes in the politics of the Kremlin and the USSR more generally. In 1956 Khrushchev publicly criticised the cult of personality and many other aspects of Stalin's politics; in his famous speech, he listed and condemned many Stalinists crimes. Khrushchev proclaimed the end of the severe version of the communist regime, but not many years later he was also to become leader with an almost absolute power. Even though the political situation seemed to be improving gradually after Stalin's death, there were still instances of 'Stalinism', such as the brutal suppression of the Hungarian revolt of 1956, or the building of the Berlin's wall dividing the city between the Eastern and Western parts in Germany in 1961. The Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962 brought

the world to the brink of nuclear war.⁹⁴ The global political situation was far from what could be described as 'stable.'

Czechoslovakia was at this time still a police state, although the repressive measures were no longer totally irrational. Citizens gained greater freedoms, provided they were not involved in politics. The economic situation improved slightly, yet due to a poor variety of products available in the country's centrally regulated shops, the whole of Czechoslovakian society had not only a very similar diet, but also a very similar style of dress. Across the whole country people seemed to have washed all the colour out of their clothes, and a strange uniformity was overwhelmingly evident. From a sociological point of view, the pitiful quality of day to day life led to a number of pathologies. For example, the number of divorces increased and there was a near-total loss of interest in an ordinary working life; also, theft increased. A significant portion of the society lost their interest in cultural and spiritual values.⁹⁵

The state, in an effort to overcome these cultural lacunae, tried to fill the life of the common people with military and folklore shows and celebrations, some of which even attracted crowds. In the mid-sixties, new and positive developments in the economic situation greatly influenced the style of life in Czechoslovakia. As soon as people were able to buy the necessary products for building new houses, many of them started to spend their free time on building sites. This had the effect that they lost interest in the current political situation in favour of creating a home.

Gradually information about the West became more readily available, and even travelling there became feasible. Western music and fashion slowly started to influence people behind the iron curtain, especially the youth. 'Rock' n 'roll' came to Czechoslovakia along with Big Beat Style. Long hair, threadbare jeans

⁹⁴ Laqueur, W., *Historia Europy 1945 - 1992*, Londyn 1993

⁹⁵ *Dějiny země koruny české*, Jaroslava Pešková, Praha 1993, p. 274-293

and loud music – attributes far removed from the idealised socialist depiction of youth. The changing times also embraced writers and people connected with artistic environment.⁹⁶ Many of them ignored the orthodox rules of socialist writing and began to be more aware of the political situation and realities of life in communist countries; issues so far avoided by both politicians and citizens.⁹⁷ Among them were writers such as Milan Kundera, Josef Škorecký, Bohumil Hrabal or playwrights like Vacláv Havel, J. Topol and I. Vyskočil. They made their comments on the reality of Czechoslovakian life in the 1950's and 60's. At the same time Western spectators had a chance to see and appreciate Czech movie directors like Miloš Forman. These profound changes provoked society to be more aware of the whole situation in the country.

It was in that political and sociological background that the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* came to life in 1966. Although the political situation was more relaxed and free than in the 1950's, people like Svěrák were still irritated by the quality of life and the cultural and political awareness of the citizenry. Despite superficial changes and minor improvements in the economy, Czechoslovakia remained a communist country and remnants of the previously all-encompassing personality cult were still to be felt. The cult of personality therefore became the basis for humorous mystification, along with parody of national stereotypes as well as parody of national shortcomings and complexes. The character of Jára Cimrman was the perfect medium through which to give expression to the Czech inferiority complex. His spectacular achievements overshadowed the achievements of even the greatest geniuses. It was at a time when the Czech nation seemed to be retreating from difficulties and often felt discouraged that the work of the forgotten Czech genius was brought to daylight.

It was created in certain times, but when questions arose as to whether the theatre was meant to be a direct satire, Zdeněk Svěrák said they did not create

⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 274-293

⁹⁷ Ibid. p. 274 -293

any direct satire: "The fact that we have been giving the same performances for the last thirty five years shows that it couldn't be direct satire for that time. Otherwise people would not laugh anymore."⁹⁸ Even though the leaders were worshipped to the extent that they were, there is remarkably little knowledge of their private lives – especially that of Stalin.⁹⁹ Of course there were plenty of biographies, but they were strictly controlled and resembled fairy-tales about different heroes rather than any actual living human beings. Similarly, many aspects of Jára Cimrman's life are unclear. The information given about his birth suggests that he is an imaginary person and at the same time it provokes a series of speculations as to how he actually came to life. It suffices to say that nowadays in the Czech Republic there are several different places where he was seen "for the last time" or was hosted. For example Stanislav Šaflář claims that the great genius himself was a guest at his house in České Budějovice in the year 1907. To make this 'great event' event more memorable he placed a plaque on the wall of the house with the information and a dedication for the all brave Czechs.¹⁰⁰ He admits he felt inspired to such action after Jára Cimrman almost won the official Czech Television contest "The Most Popular Czech of All Times." In that way Czechs participate in the mystification of Jára Cimrman.

We are now in a position to elaborate on the similarities between this humble "forgotten genius" and the cruel leader that we have singled out for analysis. Firstly, the times he was created in – in the late sixties people already realised the danger and at the same time the phenomenon of leadership and the cult of personality. As the political situation relaxed, a room for laughter appeared. Laughter can have a therapeutic function – especially after undergoing a serious and dangerous situation which overwhelmed one's entire life. Jára Cimrman was not exclusively a parody for an omniscient leader, but one could nevertheless find several common points between the worshipped personality and the Czech

⁹⁸ *Mystifikace aby byla legrace*, interview with Zdeněk Svěrák by Ewelina Hebda and Agnieszka Szabelska, Krakow, 5th April 2003, published in *Rumburak*, No 19, June 2003 (Translated by E. Hebda), p.5

⁹⁹ Narkiewicz, O.A., op. cit., p.24

genius himself, who thus became a witty parody of a leader seen as a genius above all geniuses.

When related to the time in which he was created, Jára Cimrman could be seen as a perfect satire of a genius who was supposed to succeed at anything he got involved with - Lenin. The Russian leader not only wrote thousands of pages on many major cultural, scientific and political matters but he was also quoted on different occasions as a top specialist on almost everything. The extent of his glorification was demonstrated by the fact that simply recalling his name guaranteed any audience's approval - the invocation was sufficient proof that the speaker was undoubtedly right. Of course this led to frequent abuse. Extracting different quotations and placing them in any context became very popular among many leaders who succeeded Lenin. "By exploiting Lenin's authority and skilfully utilising a technique of selective quotations from his writings, the current leader could safely introduce his own views. Stalin, Khrushchev and Brezhnev manipulated, tempered and modified Leninism, each of them for his own political ends.¹⁰¹" This is a clear mystification of the leader.

Very often the leader carried out a number of different "jobs". For example, Stalin "acted as the commander-in-chief, minister of defence, the forces' quartermaster, minister of supply [and] foreign minister¹⁰²" all at once. Beside that, every time the current leader published a book, scientific conferences and seminars for librarians and "workers on the cultural front" were organised around the leader's latest oeuvre. Such books instantly gained top ratings on all library lists in the whole country.¹⁰³ Professors, librarians, politicians and even philosophers gathered together to discuss the leader's "masterpiece" from different angles. It is important to mention that some of those scientists gained their position especially for their research carried out on the leaders' work. Every stage play of

¹⁰⁰ Rytířová, M., 'Mistr Jára se kál na Jihu Čech', *Českobudějovické Listy*, 17/09/2005

¹⁰¹ Korsch, B., *The Brezhnev personality cult - continuity*, Jerusalem 1987, p. 4

¹⁰² Narkiewicz, O.A., op. cit., p. 24

¹⁰³ Korsch, B., op. cit.

Jára Cimrman is preceded by such a seminar. Different scholars present their papers on some of the Czech genius' works and then all of them try to present one of his stage plays. In this manner, they all come together to discuss and present their master's work. As Svěrák put it: "In the play that follows the seminar we are simply scholars who decided to try hard to present a play by the master without performing too much. We do what is possible and we present it to you."¹⁰⁴

This approach adds to the comedy of the performance. It is made even more comical when one considers the absurdity of a situation in which serious academic scholars at an earnest assembly discuss every single sentence of their leader's latest work without even thinking of raising the sort of piercing questions that academics would raise in a free society. In this way the mystification around Cimrman manages to parody that surrounding to communist autocrats in a very subtle and refined way.

Jára Cimrman was the world's greatest writer, inventor, skier and philosopher. Whether you agree or disagree with it will not change this fact. (...) In 1967, the Society for the Rehabilitation of the Identity and Work of the Great Unknown Czech Jára Cimrman was established in Prague.¹⁰⁵

One can learn of his greatness as a philosopher from the seminars. For example that he created his own theory based on the total negation of solipsism, which he called externism. Cimrman supposedly took the solipsist concept: "Only I exist, there is nothing besides me, the external world does not exist, and everything is merely a figment of my imagination"¹⁰⁶ and said that the truth is actually the other way round: "There is the external world, but I do not exist." As we could learn from this fictional genius's biography, thanks to his extraordinary character, charisma, and standing among his peers, Cimrman's conclusions and

¹⁰⁴ *Mystifikace aby byla legrace*, interview with Zdeněk Svěrák...op.cit, p.6

¹⁰⁵ *Jára Cimrman zapomenutý a znovuobjevený (Jára Cimrman forgotten and rediscovered)* by Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák, *Lidové noviny* 29.12.2000, translated by Ewelina Hebda

¹⁰⁶ Smoljak L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo Jary Cimrmana*...op.cit., pp. 35-37

theories immediately caused a great dispute among philosophers of his time.¹⁰⁷ He also plays a significant role in most of the projects and discoveries that had great influence on our civilisation:

Cimrman left traces in many countries all over the world. He submitted the original proposal for the Panama Canal to the American government along with the libretto for the opera of the same title. He reformed the Galician education system. Together with Count Zeppelin he constructed the first racing aircraft made of Swedish steel and Czech wicker. He was the first man to work as a midwife in the harsh conditions of the Swiss Alps. He researched the life and behaviour of polar Samoyed dogs whilst running away from the hungry tribe of the Chuck. He missed the North Pole, having been just seven meters away from it. In Paraguay he set up a revolutionary glove-puppet theatre with the intention of thereby overthrowing the puppet government. He wrote eager letters to George Bernard Shaw, but the unyielding Irishman never replied. Cimrman invented yogurt. Furthermore, he assisted a number of the world's greatest men in attaining their goals: he caught all the flies in Edison's experimental vacuum chamber; found a bargain flat for Eiffel to rent; he praised Chekhov's Cherry Orchard and fertilised his orchard.¹⁰⁸

Everything he did was "exceptional" and "unusual", even though his reasoning was quite far away from what is considered by most to be common sense. This can be interpreted as being a mockery of the much-advertised greatness of the exceptional leader who, according to the propaganda machine that supports him, will always be shown to have contributed significantly to all aspects of the nation's life. Absurd situations such as the catching of flies in Edison's vacuum and the fertilising of Chekhov's orchard give evidence of his unquestionable and respect-engendering qualities; Cimrman was always present at the creation, always instrumental in bringing about great change and innovation.

¹⁰⁷ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., pp. 12-35

¹⁰⁸ *Jára Cimrman zapomenutý a znovuobjevený...op.cit., Lidové noviny 29.12.2000*

6 The Phenomenon of Jára Cimrman

In the following chapter we will look more closely at the significant phenomenon of Jára Cimrman. As we have seen above, he is a figure by now inextricably linked with Czech culture since the 1960s.

6.1 Jára Cimrman – The Czech Genius

"Jára Cimrman was born on the day he was discovered. As long as nobody knew him he did not exist."¹⁰⁹ This sentence clearly shows the intentions of the creators of the Czech genius. From the beginning it was a mystification that was intended to be discovered. As with pataphysics, the discovery is not the end of the game but merely its beginning and is essentially an invitation to partake in it. When asked during an interview about how the idea of Czech genius came to life Zdeněk Svěrák answered:

"It is a long story. We started everything at the time we were radio journalists. We ran a hoax program called *Non-alcoholic Wine Bar at Spider's*. It was based on the idea that one can hear but not see what is happening on the radio, and we succeeded in creating a perfect mystification, that people thought such a wine bar really existed in Prague. We had every sound effect in the studio, we played music, replicated the clatter of wine glasses, and so on. We also played the best foreign jazz bands. Smarter listeners realised that it was all made up, but it had been so perfect that others believed it. We succeeded in using mystification for humorous purposes, and we did the same while on the stage later on. Those listeners who discovered the game became our first audiences. There are plenty of different types of mystification, for example, the one made on purpose like the adulterer, he who wants to capture money, or we had those famous manuscripts like *zelenohorský*. They both were another type of mystification – to buoy the nation up. But our mystification wanted to be marked. Those who do not manage to find out it was a fake could not have fun. This mystification was designed to entertain."¹¹⁰

Interesting is also the whole idea of Theatre presenting Czech genius's works:

¹⁰⁹ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo Járy Cimrmana*, Praha 1987, p. 9

¹¹⁰ *Mystifikace aby byla...op.cit.*, p. 4

"Our theatre hasn't got any professional actors at all, they wouldn't even be suitable for that. This first part, the series of presentations, doesn't need any acting. I am a former teacher as well as Křepelka, and in the same way I am giving my paper from the rostrum, I gave it in the classroom in front of students. This doesn't need any performing, for example such as an absent-minded professor."¹¹¹

Despite having worked on Cimrman for almost forty years, the creators are yet definitively to decide on a final version of his biography. It is likely that this lack of precision in the genius' personal history is a deliberate aspect of the mystification. By maintaining a certain level of ambiguity, they ensure that they have the space to develop the character in any direction they please. In this way, Cimrman's history avoids the creative trap of being too rigidly defined, which would suffocate his development. This is also one of the reasons why it is so easy for the audience to participate in the mystification. The blank chapters in Cimrman's biography provoke the audience into actively participating in filling the gaps. Cimrman's biography – or rather, the closest thing there is to a biography – is set out in the Appendix A. It is compiled by Smoljak and Svěrák and offers a very clear illustration of the manner in which they explore the forgotten genius' life.

6.2 Jára Cimrman as a pop-cultural phenomenon.

The extent to which Jára Cimrman is important for Czech culture became obvious when at the beginning of 2005 Czech Television announced the nomination for *The Greatest Czech* awards. On the 15th of January, two weeks after the show has started, it looked like most people gave their votes to the Czech genius who had never existed. He appeared among such significant personalities as Tomas Garrigue Masaryk or Václav Havel, he was even ahead of Saint Wenceslas and Franz Kafka. To the disappointment of the voters, Czech Television decided to disqualify Jára Cimrman from the contest.¹¹² "We'd like to stress that although viewers can vote for anyone" ČT spokesman Martin Krafl

¹¹¹ *Mystifikace aby byla legrace...*, op. cit., p. 5

¹¹² The announcement is available on www.ceskatelevize.cz/specialy/nejvetsicech/oprojektu_aktuality?id=06

said, "Cimrman can't win because he's not real."¹¹³ The situation was broadly commented on. Some people looked for answers as to why a fictitious character could win such an award in Czech history. According to Marie Pošmurová, a psychologist from Charles University in Prague, "This wouldn't be happening if not for our history. We had communism, and before that, rule by the Germans. People are not happy with politicians and history, so they pick a fictitious character."¹¹⁴ However Jára Cimrman was not the only fictional character that appeared during the voting. Josef Švejk, "the dim-witted World War I soldier who confounds his superiors with good intentions and painfully simple logic"¹¹⁵ also appeared on the list, as a further evidence of the Czech fascination for, and adoration of mystification in popular figures.

Although Jára Cimrman could not take part in the contest, Czech Television promised to screen a 40-minute documentary on his life and works, among other documentaries on the top ten greatest Czechs ever, to comfort the disappointed voters who on the one hand could vote for anyone they wanted but at the same time were warned that only really existing Czechs could win. Zdeněk Svěrák, the creator of the fictional Czech genius, commented on the situation with his typical wit, saying that Jára Cimrman is excluded from appreciation and an appropriate public honouring in death as he was in life, even though he surely was the greatest Czech ever. At the same time he confirmed that Jára Cimrman's Theatre group had nothing to do with the matter of voting for a fictional character.¹¹⁶ There were even suggestions by supporters of Jára Cimrman that letting him enter the television contest would enable an interesting media event in which Czech Television could prove its ironic distance to its products.¹¹⁷ This would correspond perfectly with the Czech sense of humour. If the programme had not

¹¹³ Reynolds, M., *Show looks for 'greatest Czech'*, *The Prague Post*, Jan. 27, 2005, www.praguepost.com/P03/2005/Art./0127/news2.php

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *Jára Cimrman byl možná největší, vyhrát přesto nesmí* (13. 01. 2005), www.ceskatelevize.cz/specialy/nejvetsicech/oprojektu_napsalidetail?id=25

¹¹⁷ Kartous, B., *Jára morálním vítězem?*, *Britské listy*, ISSN 1213-1792, www.blisty.cz/2005/1/14/art/21531.html

been taken so seriously by the television management¹¹⁸ (and Jára Cimrman had been allowed to win), it would have been an international phenomenon.¹¹⁹

An interesting parallel on a more global scale is a recent internet phenomenon known as *Chuck Norris Facts* or *Chuck Norris Mania*.¹²⁰ This constantly enriched documentation and description of the actor's absurd heroic feats and characteristics have been in circulation since 2005. Although he is 'a flesh and blood' person he became an irrational hero identified strongly with the character of *Walker, Texas Ranger* played by him on television. Therefore one could essentially consider him a fictional character. From 2005 on people add his name to different contests, many times his enormous power and supernatural skills are seen as significant for science, culture and nature phenomena, for the functioning of society or even revolution theory. For example one could learn about Chuck Norris that "there is no theory of evolution. Just a list of animals Chuck Norris allows to live", or "there is no such a thing as global warming. Chuck Norris was cold, so he turned the sun up." He was the one who "counted to infinity. Twice.", and he "doesn't read books. He stares them down until he gets the information he wants." He also "frequently donates blood to the Red Cross. Just not his own." Perhaps most absurdly, his tears "cure cancer. Too bad he has never cried." Even quotations of different public personalities were changed to fit them into this recent mania: "As President Roosevelt said: We have nothing to fear but fear itself. And Chuck Norris."¹²¹

Instead of being forgotten after the television series finished, he became an urban legend. His almost mythical heroism became a source of amusement, firstly in

¹¹⁸ see also Čulík, J., *Největší Čech a Jára Cimrman, Britské listy*, ISSN 1213-1792, www.blisty.cz/art/22012.html

¹¹⁹ In 2003 during the contest for the Greatest American taking place in the USA BBC organised a similar poll in which non-Americans voted online. As a result a cartoon character, Homer Simpson was chosen the Greatest American by over 40% of participants. More details can be find on the websites:

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2985728.stm> or www.msnbc.msn.com/id/18237345/site/newsweek

¹²⁰ see also Farhi, P., *Tough Love: Norris Fans Board the Chuck Wagon*, *Washington Post*, January 2, 2006;

Page C01; available on www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/01/02/AR2006010200282.html

¹²¹ These any many other *facts* about Chuck Norris one can find on www.chucknorrisfacts.com

the United States, then thanks to the internet all over the world. The analogy to Jára Cimrman lies in the supernatural abilities of both characters, and in the ascribing to them, by the public, the most surprising influences in different areas of life. For example the Czech genius is said to have invented not only the light bulb, constructed first rigid airship but also invented the internet. The comparison goes beyond that, as both of these super heroes have web pages where one can share some incredible facts from their lives.¹²² Therefore it is possible for readers to participate in the creation of their heroes' life stories. This is a kind of game in which spectators gladly participate, respecting its rules. These are social games which arise spontaneously and are co-ordinated only to the extent of the existence of web sites where one can easily find and even add information about one's favourite character. The origins of such amusement probably lie in human nature, human desire to play and laugh in contradiction to the seriousness of many aspects of life¹²³. Also, both characters are a clear parody of nationally stereotypical craving for a hero. In Czech culture it is a silent genius, the multi-talented Czech citizen, an individual who despite spending his life undiscovered has participated in the most significant inventions of his time in almost every meaningful field, be it physics, philosophy, mathematics, theatre, literature or folklore. In American culture it is the almost supernatural hero, a guard of order and justice, who can dispense this in the tradition of the lone Ranger. At this point the similarities end as Jára Cimrman never really existed, has a theatre to his name, which has been performing for over forty years, and Chuck Norris is a real Hollywood actor who became the parody of an extraordinary hero in a wild west in a craze that expired after just over a year. Unlike Jára Cimrman's, Chuck Norris' craze depended most heavily on the internet.

Jára Cimrman's phenomenon exists mostly in the Czech Republic, as it is very much bonded with Czech culture, Czech national stereotypes and most of all the

¹²² Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo...*, op.cit. p. 11-33

¹²³ Huizinga, J., *Homo ludens. A study of the play-element in culture*, translated by R.F.C. Hull, London 1949. p. 6

Czech sense of humour. But there also exist English language web pages where his fans can learn facts from his life, and as mentioned before add their own. Not only have streets been named after the fictional Czech genius (i.e. in Brno, Stará Huť and Horšovský Týn), but in January 1996 a new asteroid was discovered and named 7796 Járacimrman.

6.3 Mocking national complexes and stereotypes

Every nation has certain complexes and stereotypes, both about other nations and about themselves. Stereotypes generally depend on the so-called public relations, the direction of the politics of a certain country or on literature.¹²⁴ Sometimes such group concepts express an accurate judgement, or are at least based on good observation.¹²⁵ Most stereotypes are based on limited views and simplified judgements are not particularly useful and not very welcome either.¹²⁶ Simplification, exaggeration and distortion cannot bring much benefit, and there is a tendency to remove stereotypes through education.

Nevertheless, stereotypes still exist and are very often a cheerful material especially for those gifted with a comic approach, a great sense of humour and a distance towards themselves and their own nationality.¹²⁷ One of the most popular examples of a stereotype of a typical Czech is soldier Švejk, the main character from Hašek's novel *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War*.¹²⁸ His grotesque view of the world and unconventional way of thinking and expressing himself made him one of the most popular characters in the Czech literature. His simple language combined with his pseudo-philosophical commentaries creates strong comical effect. Thanks to his play-acting and his

¹²⁴ *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought*, London 1983, p. 601 (in:) Bokszański, Z., *Narody a kultura*, Wrocław 1997, p. 6

¹²⁵ *Narody i stereotypy*, edited by Walas, T., Krakow 1995, p. 35 - 42

¹²⁶ Rákos, P., *Národní povaha naše a těch druhých. Sebeklamy a předsudky jako dějinnotvorná síla*, Bratislava 2001, p.58-75

¹²⁷ Waczków, J., (in:) Bohumil Hrabal *Obsluhovalém anglielskeho króla*, Czeladź 1990, s. 173

¹²⁸ Hašek, J., *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War*, London, Heinemann 1973, translated by Cecil Parrot

cynical attitude towards the army and the Emperor he is able to survive and remain untouched despite serving in the Austro-Hungarian army during World War II. In some way via the novel Hašek dealt with the World War I in which he himself participated, as well as with the whole situation of the Czech nation deeply involved in a political compromise and military conquest, living within bureaucratic borders and mixed with different nationalities. That situation, which remained virtually the same for more or less three centuries, strongly influenced the Czech nation, which developed different ways of coping with it. Hašek's remedy was based on mocking the situation and good soldier Švejk comes as a perfect example for this. At first he seemed passive and naive, very simple and jolly, but at the same time this harmless approach lets Švejk survive unharmed in very hard and difficult circumstances. To sum up, being passive, naive and full of a sense of humour towards the situation as well as towards oneself is one of the features of the stereotypical national character which allowed the Czech nation to manage throughout this rough period. In his conference paper 'Czech stereotype of Czechs and Czech stereotype of Poles' Antonín Měšťan ¹²⁹ recalls both positive and negative stereotypes that the Czechs have about themselves. In his opinion, positive stereotypes are very similar if not the same among most European nations. They all in their own eyes are democratic, peace loving, working hard, tolerant, humble and free thinking. At the same time he emphasises that most of the European nations that he is aware of have very similar allegations in terms of their own shortcomings.

The three centuries of an uneasy political situation and an uncertain future gave birth to another national characteristic, or even complex. Struggling with being overwhelmed by German language and literature, Czech writers decided to restore their own national heritage of their literature and language. For many centuries Czech politics were strongly influenced and controlled by Austria, and the Czech lands never had any aspirations of becoming an independent power.

¹²⁹ *Narody i stereotypy*, op. cit., p. 35 - 42

The culture was aimed mostly at the middle class society, as the nobility was strongly germanised. Still the German influence was significant to the extent that a full development of Czech literature came only at the beginning of the nineteenth century. After having been influenced for so many centuries by German culture, at the time of national revival Czech scholars recalled medieval poems and documents which they forged themselves.¹³⁰ For many years the Czech national revival was partly based on forged manuscripts, which were claimed to be original medieval documents. After the deception had been discovered, some scholars still wanted to believe that the manuscripts were genuine, or at least that they played an important role in the revival. This was, to a certain extent, what opened the door for the acceptance of mystification in Czech literature. Mystification thus began to play a great role in Czech literature.

Amusing others through the exploration of one's own national shortcomings and virtues seems to be very successful in terms of Svěrák's and Smoljak's work. Beside the Jára Cimrman character created by Smoljak and Svěrák, there is also an alternate image of the genius, created by previous Smoljak and Svěrák collaborators, Šebánek and Velebný¹³¹. Their Cimrman seems to be more definite. He resembles more the character from the folklore tales, *hloupy Honza*. His extraordinary actions are almost purely accidental and he himself is very naïve. The genius's biography gives details of the precise circumstances of his death and generally leaves much less room for speculation about, for example, his whereabouts. The life and work of the genius was presented through satirical events organised sporadically by *Salon Cimrman*, a TV show founded by Šebánek in 1980, after his split from the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*. The show closed down in 1989 to show solidarity with the many protesting Czech theatres groups. It reopened for a short period in 1998. Also, its performances were simply one-off, which consisted of spoof lectures and short movies from

¹³⁰ Serwatka, T., *Polacy i Czesi. Dziesięć wieków sąsiedztwa*, Nowa Ruda 1998, s. 63

¹³¹ Šebánek, J., Velebný, K., *Byli jsme a buben: o hudebním a jiném díle Járy Cimrmana*, Praha, Panton 1988

expeditions and events.¹³² The show has never been as popular and well known as the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*.

The success of the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* could be seen in their witty commentaries on national stereotypes. Jára Cimrman himself is a humble genius who most of the time cannot be appreciated by anyone because of being far ahead of his contemporaries with his completely unusual way of reasoning and dealing with reality. He was born in Vienna but lived in Prague – both cities are of a great significance for Czech culture, and at the time of strong influence on the Czech political life by Austria – according to the genius's biography the cities were competing with each other in order to gain a cultural leadership. In fact, Prague was still a provincial town at the time. From Cimrman's biography it would appear that once his genius had been officially recognised, the cities began to compete for the claim that he "belonged" to them. The humble genius who had been underestimated all his life was finally recognised and appreciated.

One of the stereotypical views of the Czech national character is based on the long-term dependency of the Czech nation on Austria – the Czechs are frequently seen as conformists. Jára Cimrman however is a non-conformist in many ways. As we saw above, he invented most bizarre philosophical theories, like for example the contradiction to solipsism, which was called *externism*¹³³ (see section 5.3). Whatever area of science, art or life he got involved with – be it criminology, school teaching, theatre, or physics – he always presented some innovative, very often revolutionary ideas. He is not afraid at all of making public comments or statements even when they seem to be highly inappropriate. Jára Cimrman also happened to be involved in some of the most crucial historical or scientific events and discoveries, such as helping Eiffel on the final plans for his tower, or inventing the telephone and even the light bulb.

¹³² More detailed information about particular shows of *Salon Cimrman* can be found on www.ceskatelevize.cz/specialy/saloncimrman/prehled-dilu.php

¹³³ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo Járy Cimrmana*, Praha 1987, pp. 35-37

These and many more creative and crazy inventions can be seen in the Petřín museum of Jára Cimrman in Prague. These have made him a very popular character among Czech people from different age groups and of different professions. What binds all of them is a certain type of humour which the theatre presents.

For example, in the play called *The reaching of the North Pole (Dobytí severního pólu)* the audience is informed that the first person ever to reach the North Pole was a Czech citizen, Karel Němec. The joke here lies in the surname, which in Czech means "German". It has been suggested that due to the nature of this surname no one remembered that the first person on the North Pole was actually Czech.

The play also makes a mockery of the type of claims to records and achievements that are designed to uplift nations. For instance, the North Pole expedition is shown at its least noble and inspiring moments – when they are drifting away on a floating piece of ice and discussing who of them should be eaten due to the food shortage. Despite the adverse conditions and the ignoble deeds being contemplated, they still try to emphasise how significant and exceptional the Czech nation is (and therefore they are) by singing this song:

Polární noc / má zvláštní moc / každého přepadne smutek / Němec i Brit / křesťan i žid / každý by nejradši utek / Ba i ti šikovní Žapoňci / se silami jsou na konci / jen jeden s národů neskoná / a hrůzy severu překoná / slavne překoná / Tam, kde hynou vlci / tam kde hynou sobi reindeers / Čech se přispůsobí / Čech se přispůsobí.¹³⁴

(The polar night has a special power; it makes everyone melancholic, German and Briton, Christian and Jew all of them would rather escape from here. Even the skilful Japanese are at the end of their tether, but there is one nation that will survive and will conquer the northern horrors and conquer them gloriously. Where wolves die, where reindeers die, Czechs will acclimatise, Czechs will acclimatise.)

¹³⁴ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *To nejlepší ze Smoljaka, Svěráka a Járy Cimrmana I*, Praha 2004, p. 60, fragment translated from Czech into English by Hebda, E.

The song mocks stereotypes concerning the exceptional powers, skills and strengths of the Czech nation and the hopeless circumstances encountered by the expedition only add to the absurdity of the lyrics. The chorus line: “*Czechs will acclimatise*”, when combined with the extreme situation, brings forth an element of black humour: “acclimatise” here means adjusting to the inhospitable conditions performing act of cannibalism. This is hardly an honourable act worth lauding in a song.

The play *The Inn at the forest clearing* (*Hospoda na mytínce*) is introduced by Cimrman’s researchers as one of the greatest operatic works in the history of Czech music, when in fact it merely compiles famous pieces by Strauss, Nedbal, Lehár and Pisáček. The libretto of the Cimrman’s work is a rather simple story which illustrates the encounter between a certain Count Zeppelin, who is obsessed with sex and women, a prisoner who escapes on the penultimate day of his 20-year prison sentence and the owner of the Inn, who pretends that he has a beautiful grand-daughter in order to make his guests stay. Cimrman’s alleged musical masterpiece is thus a parody of famous national opera works such as Nedbal’s *Polish blood* (*Polská krev*). Count Zeppelin even sings an aria from the aforementioned opera: *Brothers, my heart cries* (*Bratři, mé srdce plá*).¹³⁵

The core of the story is the conflict that inevitably arises between the prisoner Kulhánek who has a very romantic approach to women and love and Count Zeppelin, who is driven by a hedonistic desire for sex. It is worth noting that the prisoner has a Czech surname whereas the count is clearly of German origin. Their opposite approaches towards women are central to the comedic situation:

Vězeň: Ona je vánek v korunách stromů. Ona je horský potůček. Ona je kapička rosičky na travičce. Ona je...

Hrabě: Prd. Počkejte, až tu vaši kapičku rosičky placnu po zadku, jak se povyskočí.¹³⁶

(Prisoner: She is like a breeze in the crowns of trees, she is like a little mountain stream, she is like little morning dew on a little blade of grass. She is...

¹³⁵ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo...*, op. cit., pp. 106-124

¹³⁶ *Ibidem*, p.121 [translated from Czech into English by Hebda, E.]

Count: Bollocks. Wait till I smack your little morning dew's bottom, how she will jump!)

The parody is based on the contradictory image of the innocent, simple Czech and the filthy German aristocrat. The image represents a view that was especially popular during the times when the Czech nation was striving for independence in the nineteenth century. This form of national pride is very often mocked in the plays of Svěrák and Smoljak.

Each of the plays touches either some cultural topics or historical issues very often mocking them in a very warm and friendly way. The parody used by Svěrák and Smoljak is not aggressive and does not involve sarcasm or harsh satire. The laugh is rather gentle and friendly, mocking but not criticising or condemning any of the targeted shortcomings.

6.4 Politics and Czech literature

Another very interesting thing is that despite very difficult political situation through the centuries many Czech writers managed to stay away from politics in their works. Czech culture and literature have their background in middle-class and plebeian environments. Therefore very often they are more concerned with playfulness and entertainment than with a heavy grind of politics. Early works by writers such as Hašek and Čapek are very good examples of such an attitude in Czech literature. It is also present in the writing of Kundera, Klíma, Kohout, Havel and Vaculík.¹³⁷ This kind of approach helped to keep literature quite independent from politics. The fate of the nation was not very often the main issue for Czech literature, in contrast to other Slavonic literatures such as Polish, for example. Czech literature and Czech writers have, to a certain extent, created an ironic distance towards themselves and their work, as well as towards their experiences and their country. On the one hand, many Czech writers have focused mostly on literature itself and not on society or the

¹³⁷ Szaruga, L. *Czeska lekcja w: Obecność* nr 15, 1986, p. 57

nation¹³⁸. At the same time, however, many significant Czech writers have fulfilled the role of the "voice of the nation". During communist times writers like Kundera or Havel were not avoiding political issues and therefore could not be officially published. Some writers even had to leave the country and remain in exile for many years. They were banned from publishing their new books and those already in print were removed from libraries and bookstores – even though nowadays it is hard to imagine Czech literature without those names.¹³⁹ At the same time it seems that the political system was more tolerant of small theatrical forms and cabarets. Groups like *Semafor* or *Jára Cimrman Theatre* worked mostly freely, although in the 1970's, times were rather difficult for them too. It could be seen as though they found a certain loophole where they could remain perceived as apolitical and harmless groups for the system, despite their occasional and subtle critiques.

In order to steer away from politics at the time when the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* has been created, Svěrák and Smoljak's hero was placed between the nineteenth and twentieth century. The chosen time allowed them to be free from being directly connected to the political situation of the present. The other reason justifying that choice could be the actual significance of that period of time as a Czech national revival. Both reasons created a very good background for the popularity of *Jára Cimrman*. But the most important about this character is the skilful, warm, and witty way of dealing with national stereotypes and complexes.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid., p.58

¹³⁹ Graczyk, E., *O Gombrowiczu, Kunderze, Grassie i innych ważnych sprawach. Eseje*, Gdańsk 1994, p. 39

7 Jára Cimrman on stage

The *Jára Cimrman Theatre* belongs to the category of theatrical styles known as the *divadla malých forem* ("theatre of small forms"). This type of theatre was very popular in the 1960s. In 1958 Ivan Vyskočil created the term *text-appeal*¹⁴¹ to describe the phenomenon of the inspiring, witty, exceptional, often absurd texts used in theatres performing on small stages. This type of theatre was based on both the older Czech cultural-humoristic tradition and that nation's experience from its time under two consecutive authoritarian regimes. Cimrman's theatre has its roots in the various cultural forms that erupted in the 1960s, but outlived all of these significantly. These other theatres stood in opposition to communism whilst at the same time often hiding their political messages deep within their texts in order to avoid censorship and persecution. They employed political satire as their predominant humoristic form and so when the political circumstances changed, their type of humour simply expired because its principle focus was removed and there was little more beyond it.

It is worth noting that out of a total of 14 Cimrman theatre plays, 10 were created before 1989. Although the Cimrman performances did often hint at ridiculing the system, these hints were subtle enough not to dominate the theatre to such an extent that the theatre itself became obsolete with the demise of communism.

The plays performed by Jára Cimrman theatre are claimed to be written by the genius and to have merely been adjusted to modern times by the literary duo

¹⁴⁰ Kubíková, P., *Ladislav Smoljak, Zdeněk Svěrák*, Československý filmový ústav, Praha 1988, pp. 3-6

Svěrák i Smoljak. Each play has nearly the same format: it starts with a series of talks given by all the researchers working on the genius's lifetime achievements. These talks usually focus on extraordinary and revolutionary works of Cimrman sometimes related to the subject of the following play. Then the academics perform the play in a spirit of amateurism and improvisation. The very first plays by the Jára Cimrman Theatre set the standard for all the subsequent performances. They did so in terms of the construction of the stage play, the type of humour employed and the fact that the cast consisted of entirely male actors. On the basis of the one of the first plays we will try to analyse the construction of the play as well as the type of humour represented by the Cimrman theatre. In it we will try to answer the question of what has made the theatre so popular for nearly forty years.

7.1 The mechanics of humour used in the comedies of the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*

In this chapter we will investigate what types of comedy are used by the Cimrman theatre, and why these methods make it so successful.

Community is very important in terms of laughter. According to Alison Ross, “research has shown that when people are alone they rarely laugh, even though the same example of humour makes them do so in a room full of people.”¹⁴² The Cimrman theatre creates a group, a community, in which one can laugh in company. The bond shared by all who come to the theatre is the sharing of the same space and watching the same show. In the Cimrman theatre the added dimension to this bond is taking part in a much bigger phenomenon that goes beyond the play itself – the life and work of the mystified Czech genius.

¹⁴¹ Tichý, Z.A., Ježek, V., *Šest z šedesátých. Divadelní legendy malých scén*, Praha 2003, p.11

¹⁴² Ross, A., *The language of humour*, London 1998, p.1

Humour has many means of delivery. The simplest categorisation of these methods is into verbal (speech, writing) and non-verbal (situations, actions, images, music) categories. The Cimrman theatre makes an extensive use of both, and much of its genius lies in the manner in which it combines these two basic aspects of humour. Svěrák and Smoljak's humour is mostly verbal, although they occasionally use non-verbal gags as well. Their verbal humour is based mostly on playing with words, and particularly on the use of wit and paradoxes. An example of using paradoxes is the situation where some characters decide to wake up another character to make sure that the latter won't be woken by the sound of the floorboards being noisily removed: *Tu jsme okamžitě probudili, (...) aby se při vytrhávání prkna z podlahy neprobudila.*¹⁴³ The jokes are often combined together, for example where a verbal joke is followed immediately by a non-verbal one. A good example of this can be found in the scene from the play *Vražda v salonním coupé* (*Murder in a restaurant carriage*):

Trachta: Udělej si pohodlí chlapče. (*Hlaváček si podepře loket o stůl*)

Hlaváček: Už ho mám, pane inspektore.

Trachta: Udělej si pohodlí, klidně si dej nohy na stůl.

Hlaváček: Takhle je to dobré, pane inspektore.

Trachta (*zařve*): Uděláš si to pohodlí, nebo ne!?

(*Hlaváček si dá nohy na stůl. Je vidět, že to pro něj příliš pohodlné není. Na levé podrážce vidí divák bílé L, na pravé P, jak si praktikant své boty označil*)¹⁴⁴

(Trachta: Make yourself comfortable, my boy. [*Hlaváček puts his elbow on a table*])

Hlaváček: I'm already comfortable, sir.

Trachta: Make yourself comfortable, feel free to put your legs on the table.

Hlaváček: It's alright, sir.

Trachta [*shouting*]: Will you make yourself comfortable or not!?

(*Hlaváček places his legs on the table. It is visible that such position is far from comfortable for him. On his left sole one could see a big letter "L", on his right sole "R", the way in which he marked his shoes.*)

¹⁴³ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo...* op.cit., p. 65 a fragment from the play called *Vyšetřování ztráty třídní knihy*, translated from Czech into English by Hebda, E.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 154, fragment of the play *Vražda v salonním coupé*, translated by Hebda, E.

The inspector, who initially wanted to be polite and relaxed, ended up taking his role far too seriously and behaved even more strictly and bossy than was previously imaginable. Furthermore, the politeness appears to have been put on only after an order to do so was received from his boss. There is evidence of his natural unsuitability for being a policeman in that Hlaváček has to mark his shoes in order to put them on in the right way. The humour is brought forward by illustrating the stereotypical behaviour of the characters, as well as their generally hyperbolised characteristics: the inspector is strict and is treating his younger colleague like a child, whereas Hlaváček represents the typical young, simple policeman who is defined by utter incompetence. The joke is continued by using the paradox, of the inspector telling off the young policeman for having his legs on the table immediately after having forced him to sit in that way:

Trachta: Rodiče se o tebe starali (...) a co ty? Jakpak ses jim odvděčil? Vyrostl z tebe slušný chlapec? Mohl by ses podívat svým rodičům do očí? Co by ti asi řekli, kdyby tě tu takhle viděli? Jak tady sedíš! Jak se mí tady válíš! Nohy na stole! Sedni se alespoň slušně, když s tebou mluvím.¹⁴⁵

(Trachta: Your parents were taking care of you (...) and you what? How are you grateful towards them? Did you become a good boy? Could you look them in the eyes? What they would say if they could see you like that? The way you sit! The way you throw yourself here! Legs on the table! You should at least sit correctly when I'm talking to you.)

A further way of triggering laughter in the audience is through punch lines, which are based on being unexpected or unconventional. For example, the end of the following sentence is rather surprising, or at least unconventional: "V nouzi nejvyšší, přinesl mi listonoš radosnou zprávu: dědeček zemřel, stáváte se majitelem hostinca Na Mýtince."¹⁴⁶ (In the deepest poverty/distress, the postman brought me joyful news: your granddad is dead, you become an owner of the Inn at the Forest Clearing.) Usually news of the death of a relative is not "joyful news"; here, however, we are made to see it as such. Here the comedy

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 154

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 106

lies in the character's unusual reaction to the news of death. Through this reaction we also learn of the character's obsession with materialistic gain.

The scene contains another joke, based on the situation that the Inn owner talks frankly to the mannequin, which is seated in a guest like pose, and whom he addresses repeatedly in that way: "můj starý - a dalo by se říci ano! vlastně jediný dobrý příteli." ("my old and one could even say, yes! the only good friend.")

Another unexpected laugh comes in the same scene, when the Inn's owner keeps talking to the doll, revealing approach of his grandfather to having the Inn, which is told by using the form of a story full of paradoxes:

"Dědeček byl vyhlášený samotář. Lidem se vyhýbal a nikoho kolem sebe nesnesl. Ale odjakživa toužil stát se hostinským. Nejdříve si otevřel hospodu u silnice na Písek. Ale chodili mu tam lidi. Pak si najal hostinec na náměstí v Opočně. Zas mu tam chodili. A tak si postavil tohleto."¹⁴⁷

("My granddad was a pronounced loner/single. He avoided people and couldn't stand having anyone around. But he always longed for being an inn keeper. First, he opened a pub on the road to Písek. But people were coming. So he rented an inn in Opočno. Again, people were coming. So he built himself this thing.")

7.2 The construction of a typical Cimmerian play

It is worth noting that all the Cimmerian plays have a very similar construction. They start with something that looks like a short seminar or a series of talks given by self-proclaimed academics. They usually devote 20-30 minutes to reading extracts concerning different aspects of the genius's life and works. Sometimes these are related to the main theme of the following play, other times they are very abstract. The play then begins. It is performed by the characters of the academics, who are now trying their best as actors. This is the first, most obvious, humorous element. It is based on the contradiction between the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 107

scholars' devoted and fervent efforts to do justice to their master's work and their clumsy, amateurish performances on stage.

The seminar also has a comic style – it could be seen as a parody of the pseudo-academic lectures or seminars that used to be organised by the communist party, during which the party leaders would purport to lecture on a subject they very often knew little about, or, indeed a subject that did not have much meaning at all (see section 5.3).

One of the first ever plays of the Cimrman theatre is called *Vyšetřování ztráty třídní knihy* (*The investigation of the vanished class book*).¹⁴⁸ The stage play follows on after nine separate short talks given by the academic characters mentioned above who then attempt to perform their master's allegedly newly discovered and reinterpreted play. The titles of the papers given before the play are as follows: *The second finding from Liptákov*, *Personal memoirs of Dr Svěrák*, *The Cimrman six and futurism*, *The division of homework: Which part shall the students forget*, *The true heir of Komenský*, *Living wood*, *Physics classes*, *The theory of epistemology/phenomenology*. The titles roughly suggest what kind of talk could be expected, although the talks do not always follow their supposed subject matter.

Each of the talks lasts around five minutes. The speakers come to the podium consecutively and deliver their short speeches, occasionally reading. Their heavily emphasised seriousness creates an additional comical situation as the subjects they are talking about are rather far from what could be of interest of a typical academic. The first lecture topic concerns a finding that was supposedly made by the academics in Cimrman's garden in Liptákov. The joke ultimately rests on the fact that there is actually no finding. The comedy is achieved by building up the audience expectations through giving a long list of the areas in which the genius has been prolifically influential, such as philosophy, drama, art, poetry and engineering. Furthermore, the audience is instructed on the

¹⁴⁸ A book containing details of the class and its students.

research methodology used by the academics. Having reached the climax of the performance, it then has been revealed that their archaeology was fruitless. Such a surprise is often used by the Cimrman theatre and has proved itself to be an excellent way of triggering laughter.

The language used creates another humorous element: it combines academic jargon with very colloquial sayings, or proverbs. The contradiction between the form and the content is very comical. For example, *Personal memories of dr Svěrák* are indeed full of personal remarks and random quotes of other research participants that are not quite suitable from the academic point of view.

The *Investigation of the vanished class book* is an excellent example of a typical stage play of the Cimrman theatre. One after another the researchers give their short presentations that prepare the atmosphere for the upcoming performance. An aspect of the scholars' approach to Cimrman that is worth mentioning is the scientific methods they employ. They try to analyse everything that might be in any way related to the genius from a scientific viewpoint:

Pro ilustraci praktické aplikace uvedených pedagogických zásad uvidíte nyní, jak vypadal cimrmanovský výklad při vlastním vyučování. Podívejme se kupříkladu na jeho hodinu fyziky. Zde udivuje Cimrman nejen důslednou názorností, ale také mistrným vedením důkazu. Ukažme si, jak vykládal dejme tomu o světle a zvuku. Nejprve stanovil základní pojmy.

Zhasnout, prosím! (*V sále se zhasne. Weigel rozsvítí svíčku*)

Toto je světlo. (*Weigel svíčku sfoukne*)

Toto je tma. Světlo prosím! (*V sále se rozsvítí*)

A teď základní pojmy akustiky. Prosím o naprosté ticho. Ještě není ticho. Tak. Toto je ticho (zazvoní zvonečkem) toto je zvuk. A nyní si ukážeme jeden pokus. Kolegové budou tak laskaví a pomohou mi.

(Čepelka vezme zvonek, Svěrák si zapálí svíčku. Weigel tleskne a oba, svítky a zvonice, vyrazí z jednoho konce jeviště na druhý. Svěrák je v cíli dřív)

Viděli jste Cimrmanův názorný důkaz, že světlo je rychlejší než zvuk.¹⁴⁹

To illustrate the practical application of his pedagogical rules you will now see how Cimrman taught during his lectures. Let's look at his physics classes. He astonishes not only with his effective theories but also with his successive presentation of relevant evidence. Let's demonstrate how he lectured, for example, about light and sound. To begin with he set the basic terms.

Switch off the light please! (*The light in the hall is switched off. Weigel lights a candle*) This is light (*Weigel blows out the candle*). This is darkness. Light please! (*The light is switched on*).

And now the basic terms of acoustics. Please be quiet. It is not quiet yet. Ok. This is silence (*he rings a bell*) and this is sound. And now we will perform an experiment. Would my colleagues be so kind and help me?

(*Čepelka takes a bell and Svěrák lights the candle. Weigle claps and both of them start to walk from one end of the stage to the other, shining and ringing. Svěrák arrives first.*)

So you have seen the Cimrman's proof that light is faster than sound.

They also approach seriously the absence of the information about the genius in works of his alleged peers. Especially the supposed remains of the texts by Cimrman are either without much of a meaning or are very trivial and obvious. Nevertheless, the scholars are amazed by every word traceable to their master and are ready to continue their search for a profound meaning in each of them. This kind of amusement can be seen to be a parody of the leaders in communism who were very often present by the authorities as the profound visionaries and indisputable geni.

A further illustration of the multi-layered nature of the comedy employed by Svěrák and Smoljak is the use of the so-called "delayed effect" routine. By this method, the audience's attention is drawn to a potential trigger for a humorous incident. This usually happens earlier on in the sketch. An instance of this is the characters of the teacher who at the very beginning of the play has troubles with his belt and he tries to fix it discretely but at the end of the play his trousers are simply falling down. The joke is only brought to fruition much later, at a point where the audience will have largely forgotten the early hint. Generally the joke will be completed at a time of heightened intensity, thus further raising the level

¹⁴⁹ Smoljak, L., Svěrák, Z., *Divadlo...* op.cit., p.74, *Vyšetřování ztráty třídní knihy*, translated by Hebda, E.

of humour (in our example, the point at which his trousers drop during the inspector's and head of the school's visit to the trouble making class).

Specifically, each persona from *The investigation of the vanished class book* is a very good example of these stereotypical characters. They include individuals such as the teacher, the head of the school, the inspector and the representative of the regional school assembly. The performance starts with a teacher adjusting his trousers shortly before he takes his place on the podium and starts to question students. He personifies character features such as looking down on students, asking them questions only to answer them himself as though they were not capable of correctly answering them anyway. He also compromises himself by showing his total submission towards his superior. He talks in a stereotypical way and could easily be found in a typical school play that is designed to mock the teacher. For example he repeats some sentences several times or announces that he has plenty of time and can just sit and wait until one of the students gives him an answer to his question. He also tries to sound youthful and 'cool' by using words that are more typical for a group of teenagers. When he does not succeed in getting the answer, he starts shouting and offending pupils. He starts to behave like a disappointed child who tries to manipulate others by outrageous and silly threats.

The teacher is also not very bright, which is exposed in the scene of reading the head of the school's announcement: without realising it he reads it loudly including all the instruction that accompany the actual announcement. The announcement itself is also full of unnecessary and insignificant information like what kind of objects went missing in which class group, or which class does not have proper covers for their copy books.

The title of the play corresponds closely with the question that is so notoriously asked by the teacher and which is the basic joke of a play: where is the class book which disappeared seven years ago? The comical situation arises when the head of the school is informed that the class book has not been found yet. The head of

the school tries to influence students in a way that is very similar to the way in which the teacher already has done it. He even reads random information received from the inspector, and includes in it all his instruction. That makes the situation even more humorous. This kind of the behaviour of the characters emphasises how dull and stereotypical they are.

The comic tension rises even further when the inspector suddenly appears and both the teacher and the head of the school try to replay the beginning of their meeting as though everything was alright and nothing odd had happened. The absurdity of the situation is underlined by an absolute obedience displayed by the teacher towards the head of the school and by both of them towards the inspector. Only the quiet pupils whose presence is suggested by the behaviour of their educators seem to be resistant to the system by their calm and lack of any reaction.

The teacher and the principal try to repeat the first moment of their meeting over and over again for the sake of the inspector who keeps losing interest. As the scene continues, new gags are added such as the inspector falling asleep and the teacher's trousers falling off. When the regional school assembly embodied by one person enters the scene, all three characters immediately show their full submission. Without success they try to inspire the pupils to sing a song and end up singing it on their own. The scene ends under absurd conditions in which the man representing the assembly is mostly interested in eating his lunch and by some bizarre misunderstanding all the teachers end up sharing his lunch and asking the students to leave the classroom. The play comes to an end.

The investigation of the vanished class book has been performed for forty years and the tickets are sold out for each show. The humour on which the play is based consists of stereotypical characters which are mocked in a straightforward way, a few gags and language jokes. Another fact worth mentioning is that the actors quite often swap their roles from show to show, thereby ensuring that none of

them focus on creating an unforgettable portrayal of that particular character. The Cimbrian theatre appears not to be based on acting alone. On the contrary, the actors are trying to look as if they were amateurs who do not even try to act. The sense of humour is neither extraordinary nor sophisticated. Nevertheless the legend that surrounds the group and the position of the theatre in modern Czech culture still attracts many viewers. The phenomenon of the forgotten Czech genius is a factor that connects all the plays into one observable fact that has different episodes. Even though the stage plays are not directly related and are not intended to create what is known as a series for example, they still form a very interesting continuum that occurs around the mystified individual Jára Cimrman.

From 1966 until 1989 Svěrák and Smoljak wrote ten plays, and a further four after the collapse of communism in their country. The thematics and poetics of the plays create a cycle. The first play, *Akt (Nude)*, consists of one scene – the first meeting between parents and their three adult sons whom they had given up for adoption. This rather serious theme proved to be an excellent basis for this comedy filled with sexual jokes and references and marked by a particularly dark sense of humour. *Akt* premiered at the same time as the play *Vyšetřování ztráty třídní knihy*. Ever since, both have been together. It makes for an interesting combination because of the more serious format of the former and the more juvenile nature of the latter. The themes of the plays are often based on very well known Czech legends and tales (*Dlouhý, Široký a Krátkozraký* or *Blaník*) and well known pieces of literature and music (*Hospoda na mýtince* and *Cimbrian v říši hudby, Nemý Bobeš, Vražda v salónním coupé*). Those topics are referred to with what one could describe as a youthful passion, thereby mocking serious themes of national importance in a playful way. The cycle culminates in the play *Švestka*, in which Svěrák and Smoljak laugh at the fact of getting old in a very warm way. Nevertheless, in the very last play, *Afrika*, the cycle comes full circle again: back to the playful themes mocking nineteenth century exploration.

The success seems to be based on an excellent idea which is combined with the charismatic individuals such as Svěrák and Smoljak. The idea concentrates on the points which are very close to the inner playfulness and at the same time are close enough to the Czech nation as such, without being too political.

This form of reasoning could explain the theatre's success if the theatre had existed or was only successful during communist times. However, eighteen years after the system collapsed, the theatre is still enormously popular among the Czech people. It seems that there is something more lasting behind the parody, something that mocks a more general stereotype of a genius and a national hero. This type of parody entertains throughout changing political situations. This type of humorous distraction is needed as an antidote to the economic or political situation especially when there are hard times. It also suggests that in such times the Czechs were longing for world-wide recognition. At the same time Jára Cimrman gives people feeling of continuity and familiarity.

7.3 The key to forty years of success

The Cimrman Theatre has been performing for almost forty years and for each performance the tickets are sold out within hours. Each of the plays is on stage for at least a few days a year so as to allow the audience to see all of them within quite a short period of time. All of the plays written by Svěrák and Smoljak are still being shown. This method helps to create a special relationship between the theatre troupe and the audience. Firstly, because each spectator has the possibility to see all of the works, and secondly, because each of the plays could be seen many times, thereby being refreshed in the audience's memories every year. This kind of situation, although risky because the audience could quickly be bored with the programme, can also create a special bond between the spectator and the actors. This kind of relationship is based on the feeling of familiarity when one knows the characters and knows what to expect and yet still find it entertaining to watch the performances. A part of the Cimrman

theatre's audience consists of just such faithful and regularly attending people. Other parts of the audience are in the theatre because of the legend which surrounds the group and their well established position in the cultural environment in Prague. Moreover, the legend of Jára Cimrman has a life of its own and the audience very often participates in the creation of both the genius's biography and work. From that perspective the theatre has a position of the source of that legend and therefore easily attracts those who are interested in the subject.

Other reasons for its popularity can be found in the role played by mass media in spreading the information about the Czech genius. Many journalists seem to love the topic and every now and again write either about the theatre itself or about Jára Cimrman as though he were of flesh and blood. The widespread popularity of both Svěrák and Smoljak cannot be forgotten as a further factor. Even though they are associated with the mystified Czech genius, each of them is a famous individual in his own right. They are respected and well known Czech citizens and are known as playwrights, directors and actors. Their cooperation has proven to be very successful on many occasions (see Annex B). Both have worked on their individual projects. Although some of them were successful, their cooperation seems to work best for them. During interviews they often joke that they have helped the unknown genius to become famous and that through this, they themselves have become celebrities.

Another aspect of the plays is the way in which they appeal to a broad audience. The plays presumably would not have endured for such a long time if they had not had such an appeal. The inherent problem in attracting a large audience is the breadth of types of humour that are likely to fascinate such a variety of people. This breadth is catered for in the multi-layered nature of the Cimrman theatre's plays. As the performances are so rich in variety, they naturally appeal to a broad (and therefore large) audience. This is one of the key features which led to the theatre's long-lived success.

The second aspect of the comedy leading to its broad popularity is its reliance on Czech national stereotypes and tendencies. It is the theatre ability to tap into the very heart of this national character conducive to their enduring success.

The construction of the performances is also humorous in its own way. The actors pretend to be amateurs who are improvising. None of the theatre troupe has a professional background or any formal training for acting on the stage. Nevertheless, their years of experience mean that their performances are far away from what one would call amateurism. Their supposed improvisations are very well prepared and yet feigned impulsiveness is fully believable. The formula of showing clumsy academics who became actors solely due to the devotion felt by them towards their master and for the sake of bringing their master's work to the attention of other people has proven to be a very successful theatrical method.

All this is of course not to suggest that the Cimrman theatre troupe spent hours planning this strategy to guarantee their success. Rather it is an analysis of their work which allows us to pinpoint those elements that could be responsible for their triumph.

Generally the characters in the plays are stereotypical. This includes not only the group of devoted scholars who are ready to do anything for the sake of bringing to the world the work of their master, but also the characters in the actual play. The characters created on the stage by the "scholars" are quite simplistic. The actors behave like amateurs and for most of the time they just say their part without actually acting at all. It can resemble the way in which the school plays are done by students in the early stages of their education. Moreover, the Cimrman theatre is male-only and the female roles are very often performed by men wearing beards and moustaches as well as using their own voice that could not be mistaken for feminine. This adds yet another layer of humour to their performance.

The mythological aspect of the Cimmerian character also plays an important role in the success of the Cimmerian Theatre. Myths as such point to matters of collective importance, even though they might be regarded as simple, fictional tales. Those collectively important elements could be represented here by all the amazing features and achievements of Cimmerian which make him such an outstanding and unforgettable individual. On the one hand the Czech genius personifies everything the nation would like to identify itself with, whilst on the other hand it is portrayed in a comical way.

The theatre offers not merely simple distraction in the style of a circus, but has a much more complex and intellectual side. The whole project is based on a form of mystification that wants to be discovered. Once discovered, it invites the ones who saw through it to participate in it. On the one hand, it is not difficult to recognise that the information about this "genius" cannot be real, but at the same time it gives the individual a feeling of joining a special circle of those who know the situation intimately as insiders, who are both sharing it and contributing to it. The plays are based mostly on the legends and stereotypes that are still present in the Czech culture of today and therefore they do not demand some extra preparation or refined education. At the same time, however, its construction gives the spectator who enters into it the feeling of being involved in something special thanks to his or her intellect's ability to uncover the game and be able to join it. This form of subtle incidental flatter has proven to be very successful over the past forty years.

Conclusion

Successful mystifications are often a mirror for a society, its hopes and fears, and even secret dreams. Also, they are able to unveil the level of education of the tricked audience. Through the ages, mystification has often played many different roles. Sometimes it has been the writer's tool to educate the audience, whilst on other occasions it has merely served to ridicule the audience. Some mystifications were never even intended to be such, but the passage of time and the changing of perceptions led to their misinterpretation. Almost anything can be subject to mystification: the style of a certain author, the authenticity of an old document, and even the actual existence of the character or work in question.

It is difficult to find a common element among all the different types of mystification. For most types it would seem that the common characteristic is that they expire upon discovery. However, there is a minority of mystifications that actually thrives on being discovered, and only then truly come to life. It is this kind that Jára Cimrman is an excellent example of, especially in Czech literature and culture with its ability and willingness to playfully experience mystification.

Both kinds do have a common point in that they must choose the correct audience to be successful. The former must have an audience that is naïve enough to let the mystification survive for as long as possible, and the second kind needs an audience that is able and willing to intellectually embrace and develop the concept.

Jára Cimrman is an example of a mystification that has grown beyond being merely a hoax or a joke. It became a cultural phenomenon; a game in which the audience willingly participates. Journalists, event organisers, politicians, and many others gladly embrace any opportunity to explore Cimrman's life, his

inventions, his travels, and his contributions to the improvement of humankind in general.

Whilst there are many instances of collective mystifications in which the audience participates (such as, most notably, the *College of Pataphysics*), these can be differentiated from Cimrman in that they are only applicable to a very limited audience in terms of their social-intellectual status. Despite the complexity of the mystification, Cimrman is embraced by a very broad audience. The *Jára Cimrman Theatre* alone is a good example of this in that it is visited by people from all levels of society, and of all ages. Beyond that, the phenomenon finds its expression all over the Czech Republic in memorial plaques, museums, exhibitions and various events dedicated to Cimrman. The unique nature of the Cimrman phenomenon shows a playfulness that is undoubtedly particular to Czech culture.

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Annex A

Lidové noviny 29.12.2000

Jára Cimrman zapomenutý a znovuobjevený (Jára Cimrman forgotten and rediscovered) by Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák (translated by Ewelina Hebda)

Jára Cimrman was the world's greatest writer, inventor, skier and philosopher. Whether you agree or disagree with it will not change this fact.

Jára Cimrman was born on the day he was discovered. Before being discovered, he did not exist. In 1967, the Society for the Rehabilitation of the Identity and Work of the Great Unknown Czech Jára Cimrman was established in Prague.

Amongst other things, the Society today includes the Cimrman Theatre, which to this day produces and performs over thirteen plays of his, and which has begun unearthing his incredible life and achievements.

The Globetrotter

Jára Cimrman was born one frosty February night as the son of Austrian actress Marlén Jelinková and Czech tailor Leopold Zimmermann.

The exact year of his birth remains uncertain. What is known is that he soon had enough of Vienna's stuffy suburbs. After throwing his spoon on the floor in anger at the Sunday dinner table, he left his home for good. All we know is that this incident occurred some time between the age of seven and thirty-seven.

From that moment on, Cimrman left traces in many countries all over the world. He submitted the original proposal for the Panama Canal to the American government along with the libretto for the opera with the same title. He reformed the Galician education system. Together with Count Zeppelin he

constructed the first racing aircraft made of Swedish steel and Czech wicker. He was the first man to work as a midwife in the harsh conditions of the Swiss Alps.

He researched the life and behaviour of polar Samoyed dogs whilst running away from the hungry tribe of the Chuck. He missed the North Pole, having been just seven meters away from it. In Paraguay he sets up a revolutionary glove puppet theatre with the intention of thereby overthrowing the puppet government. He wrote eager letters to George Bernard Shaw, but the unyielding Irishman never replied. Cimrman invented yogurt.

Furthermore, he assisted a number of the world's greatest men in attaining their goals: he caught all the flies in Edison's experimental vacuum chamber; found a bargain flat for Eiffel to rent; he praised Chekhov's Cherry Orchard and fertilized his orchard.

The Patriot

Even though Jára Cimrman was a restless globetrotter, he was always very happy to go back to his Czech fatherland. Patriotism is one of the most vivid aspects of his personality. It was the reason why he was made to suffer in Austrian dungeons. It was also the reason for his having to learn to speak Czech fluently.

Unfortunately for Cimrman, none of his contemporaries realised the true power of his genius. The only exception to this was his friend, private doctor Hugo Myslík (who was a vet). Hugo always suspected something and thought he "smelled a rat", but never told anyone of his suspicions.

Among his best friends was also a patriotic writer, Alois Jirásek.¹⁵⁰ This friendship, however, ended when Jirásek included in his volume entitled "Old

Czech Tales" the legend about Mount Blaník.¹⁵¹ In his good-bye letter to Jirásek, Cimmrman wrote: "Just because those knights never came during the entire three hundred years of Habsburg oppression doesn't mean that you can depress the nation by saying that what is happening now is nothing comparing to what will come."

Cimmrman's longing to have at least one of his plays performed on the stage of the National Theatre was never fulfilled during his lifetime. The first dramaturge of the National Theatre, Ladislav Stroupežnický, threw away at least five hundred stage plays without compassion. The vast majority of these ejected plays were the works of Jára Cimmrman, Adalbert Kolínský and Eliška Kutnohorká. The latter two of these three were Cimmrman's pen-names. The National Theatre later realised its mistake and let the Cimmrman theatre group perform their master's stage play *Záskok (Understudy)*, but only at the end of the twentieth century (31 December 1997).

The Head of the Show

For many years Cimmrman was the head of the road show Lipany. However, the progress of this troupe was stifled by its small number of actors. Showing great creative courage, Cimmrman reduced the number of sisters in Chekhov's stage play *Three Sisters* to one; he presented *Ali baba and Forty Thieves* in a rendering entitled *Ali baba Solo*; when the last actress had left his group he didn't hesitate to release Ibsen's famous *Nora* under the title *The Norwegian*.

Cimmrman never economised on equipment for the set. At the time when bicycles were a great luxury in Western Europe, an eccentric device in Czech lands, and

¹⁵⁰ Jirasek (1851 – 1930), unlike Cimmrman, is a real person. As a distinguished figure of Czech culture, he wrote many historic novels that gave formal expression to old Czech myths and legends.

¹⁵¹ The legend of Mount Blaník speaks of an army of knights who are supposedly still sleeping in this mountain. As long as the Czech nation is not in grave danger, the knights remain asleep. As soon as grave danger appears, however, they will – so the myth goes – arise from their slumber and come to the aid of the ailing Czech nation.

a topic of heated discussions among the anarchist circles of Imperial Russia, Cimrman's actors were using bicycles on a regular basis.

Unfortunately, the experienced actors left the poor road show group, only to be replaced by enthusiastic but inexperienced beginners. For them Cimrman wrote down his infamous *Ten Commandments for Actors*. His rules are valid to this very day:

1. Remember that on the stage your name is usually different to the one you have in your real life. It is also useful to know the names of the other characters in the show.
2. Always perform emotionally profound passages with your back to the audience. Both laughing and weeping can be performed by simply shrugging the shoulders.
3. Do not thank for objects thrown onto the stage during a performance.
4. When the prompter prompts, be aware that he might prompt the line that belongs to other character.
5. Always go to the toilet before the show so that during the play you do not shift anxiously from foot to foot.
6. If you star as the devil, remember before you sit down that you have got a tail.
7. If there is applause during the show, do not bow – it will almost certainly be for somebody else.
8. If there is a performed supper on the stage, do not eat – the food is fake and rubber.
9. Remember that some of the doors are only painted on the wall.
10. During final applause bow so low that no one sees that it is you who shouts "Bravo!"

The Sage

Toward the end of his life, and after a successful period of charity work in Traun at Linec (simultaneously home to the biggest Austrian dynamite factory

and the biggest Austrian orphanage), Cimrman went on a lecturing tour through southern Czech retirement homes.

He realised that the issues of retirement places and orphanages are very similar: the residence of elderly people houses were, without exception, orphans; in both places the favourite books were story tales; in both the most popular meal was porridge; in both cases they did not have a clear idea about their future.

He went on to published a book, *The Last Job*, in which he worked out the methodology of begging. He recommended the wearing of suitable clothes (warning expressly against the wearing of expensive fur coats); walking in an appropriate manner (he recommended taking courses in shuffling aimlessly); to behave in an appropriate manner (for this, the guideline idea to be borne in mind was that "during begging one should not threaten anyone, as this would be rather robbery than begging"). He also lobbied for the idea that those "beggars" who play instruments should be upgraded to the category of earning people rather than beggars.

The Genius

There is a whole troupe of academics, critics, philosophers and simple scholars who doubt that Cimrman has ever existed. These heretics perceive his work as Liptakov's mystification similar to mystification of manuscripts zelenohorský and kralovodvorský. They do not believe that such a masterpiece could be accomplished by a single man. These doubts just serve to confirm Cimrman's genius.

Also, we, the custodians of the genius' work, think that to achieve such an amazing result there must be at least two creators. Both of these should be at least average geniuses.

Annex B

All the information below is based on four interviews with Ladislav Smoljak:

1. An interview entitled *Švestka bude třináctá* by Tomáš Staniclavčík, published in *Lidové Noviny* on 25. 10. 1997.
2. An interview entitled *Třicet let s Járou*, by Jan Kolář, published in the magazine *Divadelní Noviny* in the six consecutive issues: from 14/98 to 19/98.
3. The interview recorded and conducted by Ewelina Hebda on 8.05. 2006 in the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*.
4. An interview entitled "Čelit explozi blbosti je ukol naš, kteří děláme v kultuře a umění" říká Ladislav Smoljak, by Alexandr Kramer, published in *Právo* on 04.04.1998

Smoljak and Svěrák - a Literary Duo

Ladislav Smoljak was born in Prague in 1931. He graduated from a pedagogical university having studied physics and mathematics. In the period 1958-1961 he worked as a teacher of evening classes for working people. In 1961 to 1963 he became editor of *Mladý Svět* and since 1967 he was co-author of the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*, where he is both a director and an actor even today. In the meantime, from 1963 to 1975 he was an editor in the publishing office *Mladá fronta*. Since 1967 he has worked together with Zdeněk Svěrák.

Zdeněk Svěrák was born in Prague in 1936. Between 1958 and 1961 he worked as a teacher in a school. From 1961 till 1969 he was a broadcaster on the Czechoslovakian radio. In 1967, when the fictitious character of Jára Cimrman bore fruit in establishing a theatre, Svěrák became an actor and play-writer for the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*, cooperating closely with Ladislav Smoljak. In the years 1977 - 1991 he worked as a screenplay writer in the Barandov Studio in Prague.

For many years now Svěrák has been actively involved in the charitable organisation *Paraple* which supports people with physical disabilities. In 1999 he and Smoljak together received the Medal for Merits from the president of the Czech Republic, Václav Havel.

The co-authorship of Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák is not something unusual or exceptional in Czech literature. However, it is very interesting how their teamwork has developed and strengthened over the years.¹⁵² They both claim that it is based on friendship, deep understanding, and similar literary tastes. They met at university in 1956. Smoljak was the director of and an actor in the student theatre group that Svěrák wanted to take part in. After a few years, their professional ways parted as Smoljak was offered a place as a researcher in a nuclear physics department and Svěrák became a high school teacher. After a year Smoljak gave up his academic career for a position as a schoolteacher in a small village near Prague and got married.

It was at this time that his literary career began to blossom. At first he worked for a Prague literary magazine *Kultura*. From this, he then moved to *Mlády Svět*, the literary magazine focused mostly on young talented writers. Being responsible for collecting and preparing for publication stories written by young artists, he contacted his old university friend Svěrák. From that moment their contact became more frequent and what was initially merely friendly discussion and a sharing of views, later developed into the famous powerful literary duo. To date, this duo has co-operated successfully for thirty eight years. The duo did not stop at the Cimrman idea: they made several successful comedy movies, not only writing screenplays together but also appearing together on screen.

They have starred together in the following films:

Zločin šantánu (1968)

Lucie a zárazky (1970)

Pane, vy jste vdova! (1970)

Instances of screenplay co-authorship (and occasionally appearing together on screen):

Jáchyme, hod' ho do stroje (1974)

Na samotě u lesa (1976)

Marečku, podejte mi pero! (1976)

Trhák (1980)

Jára Cimrman ležící, spící (1983),

Rozpuštěný a vypuštěný (1984)

Nejistá sezóna (1987).

Instances of successful movie co-operation where Smoljak was the director and Svěrák wrote the screenplay:

Kulový blesk (1978),

Vrchní, prchni (1980),

Most of all, their cooperation within *Jára Cimrman Theatre* brought to life fourteen plays,¹⁵³ of which only the first two were written separately. All of the plays are still performed and the audience has a chance to see each of the plays at least once a year.

Akt (premiered on 04.10.1967)

Vyšetřování ztráty třídní knihy (04.10.1967)

Hospoda na mýtince (17.04.1969)

Vražda v salónním coupé (14.05.1970)

Nemý Bobeš (24.11.1971)

Cimrman v říši hudby (03.05.1973)

Dlouhý, Široký a Krátkozraký (17.10.1974)

Posel z Liptákova (20.04.1977)

Lijavec (22.01.1982)

Dobytí Severního Pólu (25.10.1985)

Blaník (16.05.1990)

Záskok (27.03.1994)

Švestka (14.11.1997)

Afrika (05.10.2002)

Other actors of the Jára Cimrman team:

Petr Bruckner (since 1967)

Miloň Čepelka (since 1967)

Pavel Voundruška (since 1969)

Jaroslav Weigel (since 1970)

Václav Kotek (since 1973)

Jan Kašpar (since 1975)

Genadij Rumlena (1976)

Jan Hraběta (since 1979)

Bořivoj Penc (since 1983)

Marek Šimon (since 1985)

Petr Reidinger (since 1991)

ANEX C

Jára Cimrman in the Czech press: 1997-2006

Every now and again Czech readers have the pleasure of coming across information about the famous Czech genius Jára Cimrman. In the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* archive and the Czech National Library one can find a lot of articles which have the Czech genius as their subject matter with Cimrman. Having been in existence for forty years now, it is hard to imagine finding a single Czech who has not heard of him.

¹⁵³ The information is based on the official Jára Cimrman theatre website: www.cimrman.at

When Czech readers come across information on Cimrman, they might find it amusing as this fictitious and humoresque character is well known among Czech society; for uninitiated foreigners who are not familiar with Czech culture it is often merely confusing. Here and there they may come across articles describing an exhibition devoted to Jára Cimrman's life and his extraordinary inventions, or they may read about the most recent of his plays to be discovered and adapted for modern audiences by Smoljak and Svěrák.

The Cimrman phenomenon has flourished gradually since its inception in the 1960s, but the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* has experienced an immense growth in popularity in the last decade. One of the reasons could be the involvement of media in popularising the theatre. To conduct a thorough investigation of the nature of the Cimrman phenomenon, it is therefore prudent to look at its appearance and treatment in the Czech press in the period from 1997 to 2006, focusing on a few examples chosen for their particular relevance. From this, one can learn a great deal about the popular perception of the phenomenon, as well as about the way in which the myth of the forgotten Czech genius has come to live its own life, sometimes even developing independently from its creators.

Below is summarised a collection of relevant articles that illustrate the cultural setting of the Cimrman phenomenon. Most of these articles were obtained by researching the contents of the archive stored at the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* in Prague, Czech Republic.

The press cuttings have been grouped into different themes, each expounding a different aspect of Cimrman's conception, perception and continuing development. The articles are divided into three main groups: the first one shows the press's perception of the creators of the Czech genius. These are mostly interviews and sometimes summaries of the press meetings with the actors. The articles in the second group deal with the activity of the theatre, its travels abroad, its expanding to different projects, as well as information about

the books and DVDs published in association with the theatre. The third group has as its subject matter articles in which Jára Cimrman is perceived as a flesh and blood person.

These articles – and especially those in the third group – show how much the Czech people enjoy participating in the mystification of Jára Cimrman. Whilst the origin of the mystification is often explained and all are by now very familiar with it, the people of the Czech Republic seldom tire of this expression of their cultural uniqueness. Every year sees a growth in the number of events, memorials, programmes and exhibitions devoted to the life of the fictitious genius.

The Creators of Jára Cimrman

There follows a series of interviews with Smoljak and Svěrák and other creators and participants of *Jára Cimrman theatre* (Milon Čepelka, Jaroslav Weigel, Jiří Šebánek, etc.). The creation of Jára Cimrman brought them fame, especially to Smoljak and Svěrák. Very often they are asked to give their views on political and cultural issues, as they are considered as authorities in these areas. Beyond being merely knowledgeable in these areas, they are admired by the Czechs for their success, their achievements, and their warm sense of humor. The interviews with the other participants of *Jára Cimrman Theatre* appear in the press occasionally, but always in connection with the Czech genius.

Slovo, 05.11.1999

Nejsem nekonečný lidumil. Herec a scénárista Zdeněk Svěrák obdržel 28. října od prezidenta Václava Havla medaili Za zásluhy. (I am not a limitless philanthropist. Actor and screenplay writer Zdeněk Svěrák on 28th October received Medal of Merit from the president Václav Havel)

Josef Kobra Kučera

This piece is an interview with Zdeněk Svěrák after he received a medal from Mr Havel for merits for the Czech Nation for his involvement in the charity *Paraple*. The interview starts with an assertion that Svěrák's screenplays are about Czech people and for Czech people. Then the interviewer asks Svěrák about his sense of humour and how he combines it with respecting people. They talk about his cooperation with his son Jan and about his family life. Then the conversation goes towards Jára Cimrman and the theatre and about his literary duo with Smoljak. Svěrák emphasises that although the stage plays and entire concept of Jára Cimrman can be translated into foreign languages, they can only be fully embraced and understood by Czech people. The interview ends with a question about the meaning of the people and society for Svěrák. In his reply he expresses his gratefulness for the chance to have been understood and appreciated by the people of both his generation and today's youth. He emphasises that his main goal is his life is to be useful for others. In Svěrák's answer one can see both his utilitarian approach, as well as his awareness of his popularity.

Lidové Noviny 25.10.1997

Švestka bude třináctá. (The prune will be thirteenth)

An interview with Ladislav Smoljak by Tomáš Stanislavčík

The interview is concerned with the 30th anniversary of the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* and the premiere of their new play *Švestka* (Plum). It records a very interesting conversation with the director and actor Smoljak, in the course of which it reveals for example why the Theatre has not changed its programme for the last thirty years, only adding a new play every few years. He also talks about the way the audience actively participates in the process of mystification in pretending that they believe Jára Cimrman was the original author of the play they are watching. Smoljak suggests that their theatre is marked by a style similar to that which one might find in a series: all plays are constructed in a very similar way, the cast is mostly the same, and all of them are based on the same mystification idea.

Smoljak remarks on how, for more than thirty years, the theatre has remained extremely popular for both the old audience, which is very familiar with the programme, and with the younger audience which is coming to see it for the first time. He then talks briefly about the co-operation in the theatre, especially about his work with Zdeněk Svěrák, an actor and a playwright and the co-creator of the idea of Cimbrian. Smoljak then talks more about his work outside the theatre, such as acting in different plays and writing stage plays not associated with Jára Cimrman. He admits at the same time that these digressions from the Cimbrian theme are just a small chunk of his work, as that he is mostly engaged with the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*.

Večerník Praha, 23.03.1998

Kde domov můj. Ladislav Smoljak zkouší něco navíc. (Where is my home. Ladislav Smoljak tries/rehearses something more)

Jana Sporová

The article informs about Smoljak's new activity and his most recent project. Also the extra information is given about the song writing and performing activity of Svěrák, who cooperates with J. Uhlíř.

In the article, Sporová speculates on whether the Smoljak-Svěrák duo will continue to work together. The author asks Smoljak about this and quotes him as saying that both authors will, for a change, take part in slightly different projects; Svěrák in the movie industry, and Smoljak in his own new theatre productions. The article also elaborates further on Smoljak's new play *Hymna*.

Právo, 04.04.1998

"Čelit explozi blbosti je úkol náš, kteří děláme v kultuře a umění" říká Ladislav Smoljak. (It is our task, we who work in culture and art, to confront the stupidity outbreak, says Ladislav Smoljak.)

by Alexandr Kramer

This interview is very long and quite broad and covers topics ranging from the history of the Cimbrian Theatre to the state of modern Czech art and culture more generally. Smoljak states his views on the politics of the day and strongly emphasises the decidedly apolitical status of the Cimbrian Theatre. He also explains why in his opinion the theatre has remained popular for more than thirty years and that even though the times have changed it continues to attract a vast audience. In his eyes they had found a niche for a specific, abstract sense of humour that the theatre represents. He emphasises that they were never driven by a desire to be popular in that way, that they never prepared the programme in accordance with such a desire. Rather, they were trying to represent their own values and tastes. For Smoljak, only that kind of humour which is free from overtly obvious political connotations and which is not a direct satire on the then-current situation of the state, can survive. At the same time he finds politics very interesting and it is very important for him to take part in political life through, for example, voting.

Kramer asks about the state of Czech culture in a time so heavily defined by the popularity of sitcoms. Smoljak talks about the artists' duty to society in the form of guarding the quality of the entertainment and programmes aimed at the wide public. He concludes the interview by commenting on the political situation in the country, ending on the thought that active politics should be in hands of politicians.

Divadelní Noviny, 14/98 - 19/98

Třicet let s Járrou. (Thirty years with Jára)

Throughout six consecutive issues of the theatrical magazine *Divadelní Noviny* the readers have been given a chance to familiarise themselves with the life and work of Ladislav Smoljak during the thirty years he has been active in the *Jára Cimbrian Theatre*. The interview is long and goes into many details regarding the

whole phenomenon of the fictitious Czech genius. Smoljak elaborates on why they choose the end of the Austro-Hungarian age as the historical setting for the Czech genius. In his opinion this time of technological inventions, new scientific approaches and sociological and philosophical projects were full of a certain romantic spirit and naivety. This age provided them a solid cultural base for their creativity whilst maintaining a safe distance from the then-incumbent communist system of the time.

Smoljak explains in an interesting way how the theatre came to life, what the basic concept was and how it has developed during the past years. He recounts how the idea of the Czech genius evolved from a simple mystification in the beginning to become a broad cultural phenomenon that has now been thriving for three decades. Then Smoljak describes his co-operation with Zdeněk Svěrák. This co-operation is obviously of great significance, considering they wrote almost all of Cimrman's plays together. He emphasised the importance of the profound understanding that exists between them that allows them co-operate smoothly without the need for too many explanations or arguments. This mutual understanding also prevents the creating of limits or borders for development of Cimrman's character. He emphasises how close they are in their tastes and approaches towards the entire Cimrman concept and how the idea developed and established itself during the first few years; he reveals the important role that accidents played in choosing the topics for the early performances.

The article also recounts a few stories from their attempts to perform Cimrman's plays abroad. It seems that most of the performances are so deeply dependant on the idiosyncrasies of Czech language that it is hardly possible to entertain a foreign audience. Although this was supposed to be a serious interview, Smoljak often jokes, for example, while explaining why there are no women in the theatre crew. The conversation between Smoljak and Jan Kolář has a lot of the kind of playfulness and wit that are so strongly associated with the theatre

performances. There is a lot of honesty and openness when he talks about different aspects of the theatre's history, like for example the split with another of the co-founders of Jára Cimrman – Jiří Šebánek. Also Smoljak is very open when asked whether he experiences jealousy towards his companion Svěrák, who seems to be more popular and more successful although they both started from the same position.

The conversation does not stop at Jára Cimrman, as Smoljak puts the whole phenomenon into a much broader picture. He shared his views of the general predicament of Czech theatre in the sixties, as well as discussing the way in which the political situation has changed over the last thirty years. He gives a very interesting description of how the theatre's status has changed within the political changes, recalling how they had to move a few times from one theatre building to another, having they lost the right to perform in certain places due to the censorship.

The interview ends with a speculation as to what will happen to the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* when the crew become too old to perform and whether Smoljak is more an optimist or a pessimist in his approach to life. Although the answer given by Smoljak is still light and warm, it has a note of a decadency, which he associates with his age and life experiences.

Reflex, 25/98

Ladislav Smoljak: Volit je odpovědné (Ladislav Smoljak: To vote is to be responsible)

This is an interview conducted by Reflex's editorial team regarding the upcoming elections. This conversation is serious and Smoljak quite deeply and openly expresses his attitude towards elections and clearly articulates his belief

that voting is the duty of every citizen. He also talks about the current political situation in the Czech Republic against the background of the Czech history.

Playboy 11/99

Ladislav Smoljak. Rozhovor o tom, že Cimrman hned tak neumře, že Ladislav Smoljak a Zdeněk Svěrák jsou pořád kamarádi a že u žen je lepší dát přednost povaze a půvabu před krásou. (Interview about the fact that Cimrman is not quite ready to die yet; that Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák are still friends and that it is advised to prefer the character and charm of women to their beauty)

Boris Dočekal

In this nine page long interview Smoljak talks about the phenomenon of Jára Cimrman and how, in his opinion, no one has yet discovered the real cause for over thirty years of success. He explains the central role that the composition and framework of the stage plays in the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*. The interview is very extensive and explores many aspects of Smoljak's life, including his co-operation with Svěrák and his individual work, but most of all a very big part of it is devoted to the Czech genius, Cimrman. He explains how the idea has been developing over years and how the basic features for the character that he and Svěrák had originally imagined were different to those proposed by Jíří Šebánek. He also goes on to explain why the split between them and Šebánek was unavoidable, especially because the type of humour both sides presented was very different. When asked about his recent play, which he created outside the Cimrman group, Smoljak provides the interviewer with some broad explanations. He does not avoid politics and gives his views on the political situation in his country, but at the same time he emphasises that he is not an expert in all the fields. He talks about the Czech national character which also includes a discussion of Czech shortcomings, for example their pettiness or lack of self-confidence. As the interview is conducted by *Playboy* it is drawn to a close by asking Smoljak about his first love and generally about his love life and his attitude towards women.

Magazin Slovo 48/98

Kde domov můj – podle Smoljaka. Rozhovor. (Where my home is¹⁵⁴ – by Smoljak. An interview)

Lubor Falteisek

This features an interview with Ladislav Smoljak, which mentions his role in the Smoljak-Svěrák duo, as well as his input in the creation of non-existent Czech genius. At the same time it concentrates on his individual work, which goes far beyond the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*. Smoljak reveals why he feels more at home working in the theatre rather than in the movie industry. He gives more details of his new stage plays and he explains why he started Studio Jára. He also talks briefly about his views on his future and the future of *Jára Cimrman Theatre*.

Večerník Praha, 13.11.1997

Svěrák nechce na Hrad (Svěrák does not want to get to the Castle¹⁵⁵)

jas

This is a very short article about the press conference which accompanied the premiere of the new stage play *Švestka*. The author mentions that Zdeněk Svěrák strongly denied the truth of the gossip alleging that he was preparing himself for the upcoming Czech presidential elections. Nevertheless, the author of the article says that the gossip does not surprise him as Svěrák is a well known and highly respected individual in the Czech Republic. Although Svěrák was quite strict in clarifying his point of view on the presidency, at the end he nevertheless made a few jokes about him being absolutely unsuitable for the position.

Mladá fronta dnes, 14.11.1997

¹⁵⁴ The title of the Czech anthem by the Czech dramatist J.K. Tyl (1808 – 1856)

¹⁵⁵ Hrad (a castle in Prague) is the residence of the Presidents of the Czech Republic.

Jaroslav Weigel pracoval pro hluchoněmé i Formana (Jaroslav Weigel worked for mute and deaf people and for Forman)

This is a short article about Jaroslav Weigel, who has been closely associated with the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* since 1969. In the beginning Weigel was a poster designer, set designer and costume maker; later he also became involved as an actor. Although Smoljak and Svěrák are the principal representatives of the theatre, it is Weigel who is responsible for the recognisable style of the Theatre's books, photographs and posters.

Reflex 34/98

Lék na trdomyslnost. (Cure for melancholy)

Interview with Miloň Čepelka by Pavel Kovář

A former literature teacher, poet, radio journalist and actor in the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*, Miloň Čepelka talks about his role in the creation and development of Cimrman. He explains in great details how the theatre began and how the political situation influenced them. He also describes his connections to Czech cinematography. He mentions the changes in the theatre crew and shares his views on the future of the Cimrman theatre.

TV magazín, 33/98

Jiří Šebánek: Nemohl bych hrát pořád jednu hru. (Jiří Šebánek: I would not be able to act constantly in the same play.)

Ludvík Hess

In this interview Jiří Šebánek talks briefly about his life and how this affected his screenplay writing. He also elaborates on how close Cimrman's character is for him and how at the same time he does not regret that he left the theatre which he helped to set up. He recalls *Studio Jára* and explains why the programme finished in 1989. He talks about the new ideas of his for a few episodes of *Studio Jára*, which he claims will be an alone-standing project. Although talking about

Cimrman takes up most of the interview, at the end Šebánek talks about his other activities, e.g. taking part in a television programme against violence towards animals. At the end Šebánek mentions the Cimrman theatre's new show, which he claims to have been written by the Czech genius himself, and that he only adapted it for the contemporary public.

Relfex 24/2000

Jaký je cimrmanovský konec sezóny? (When does the Cimrman season end?)

Milada Čechová

This is an interview with Jan Kašpar, one of members of the Cimrman theatre, who is personally responsible for the two principal activities that are undertaken by the Cimrman's Theatre. One of them is a music and drama festival in Česká Skalice, the other is a run for the charity Paraple.¹⁵⁶ Kašpar talks about the plans for the future of Paraple. He also briefly explains why the theatre doesn't perform during summer.

Týdeník Televize, 26/2000

Nad čím posvátně jásá Zdeněk Svěrák Doba zadělávání. (What Zdeněk Svěrák is working on)

This interview with Zdeněk Svěrák is mostly focused on his activity within the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*. Svěrák is briefly introduced as an actor and screenplay writer who has already been nominated for an Oscar three times, and finally won the statue. Nevertheless, his involvement as a co-creator of the legend of Cimrman seems to be the most interesting aspect of his career for the author of this interview. Both the journalist and Svěrák talk about Cimrman as though he were a real, existing individual who had heavily influenced the development of our civilisation.

Týdeník Televize, 26/2000

¹⁵⁶ *Paraple* is a charitable organisation for children with physical disabilities. One of the main supporters of the organisation is Jan Svěrák, but the whole Cimrman team very often supports it too by organising and actively participating in fundraising events.

Petr Brukner touží po nominaci v kategorii A další šťastlivec. (Petr Brukner is longing for the nomination in the A category 'Another lucky man.')

Helena Herbrychová

An interview with Petr Bruckner, an actor, involved in *Jára Cimrman Theatre* since 1967. Bruckner talks about the meaning of the theatre and its great influence on his life and his acting career. As an interesting conclusion he mentions that very often Bruckner meets people who believe in a real existence of the forgotten Czech genius.

Story, 4/2001

Otec Járy Cimrmana stávkuje (The father of Jára Cimrman strikes)

This is a short story by Jiří Šebánek about his involvement in the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*, which ended after the second season. He decided to leave because of the significant differences on a basic aspect of the theatre between him and the rest of the team, especially Smoljak and Svěrák. He made an attempt at re-joining the Cimrman crew in the mid-seventies, only to find himself banned by the communist director of the whole theatre who thought his political views were inappropriate. Due to the political situation he was forced to work as a night guard instead.

In the eighties, together with Karel Velebný, Václav Kotek and Milon Čepelka, he created *Salon Cimrman* – a programme devoted to the life and work of the Czech genius Jára Cimrman, which consisted of multiple conversations. They did not perform in one place, but rather travelled with the performances, following invitations. In November 1989 many theatres started to protest to support the change of the government. *Salon Cimrman* joined in this strike action, and has been on strike ever since, despite the change in government. Šebánek claims that despite the fact that seven episodes of *Salon Cimrman* are currently prepared for the Czech television, he will stay in on strike, as he already has been doing for the past decade.

Tina, 19/2001

Cimrman mě nenudí (Cimrman doesn't bore me)

kat

A short article in which Zdeněk Svěrák is asked whether, after over thirty years with Jára Cimrman, he is not simply bored with this individual. The answer is in the negative and Svěrák emphasises that he has never been bored with the concept and has enjoyed performing in the Cimrman Theatre through all these years. He also reveals that he is working on a new play.

Pátek Lidových novin, 18.05.2001

Nejsem učitel národa. A dejte pokoj s prezidentem. Vždyť já nejsem tak dobrý. Já bych vlastně chtěl... (I am not a teacher of the nation. And please leave alone this president idea. I am not that good. Actually what I really want is...)

Zuzana Boušková

This is a very elaborate interview with Zdeněk Svěrák. He is introduced by a negative description listing what he is not. He is not a politician, nor a philosopher, nor a singer; he is not even a professional actor. He considers himself a theatre and movie screenplay writer. He and Boušková talk about the latest movies he has made, about his three Oscar nominations and his award winning movie. Svěrák describes the cooperation with his son, its difficulties and their future plans. He does not omit the other co-authors with whom he works: e.g. Ladislav Smoljak and Jaroslav Uhlíř. When his involvement in the charitable organisation *Paraple* is mentioned he remains humble and does not treat his activity as anything particularly unusual. When asked about the Czech nation he emphasises that it is not his ambition to be the icon or the teacher for the nation. He happily talks about the sense of humour of the Czechs and the meaning of laughter in his own life. When asked if he feels fulfilled and satisfied with his life, Svěrák answers that all the wishes he had never had came true and now he would like to write a novel, a small, funny and light story. The interview is followed by Svěrák's biography. The presentation contains many pictures from Svěrák's early childhood and youth, along with more recent photos.

Lidové noviny, 05.09.2001

Jazzový profesor a objevitel Járy Cimrmana. Příběh Karla Velebného, šůry nadaného vibrafonisty, který svou autoritou propojil tři generace jazzmanů. (Professor of jazz and discoverer of Jára Cimrman. The case of Karel Velebný, the gifted vibraphonist, whose authority connected three generation of jazzmen.)

Petr Zvoníček

The article is published in a regular column titled *Legendární příběhy minulého století* (*Legends of the past century.*) and explores the life of Karel Velebný (1931 - 1989), who supposedly invented the name of the Czech genius Jára Cimrman. Together with Šebánek and director Helena Philippova he created the radio programme which became a basis for the further mystification. Aside from being a superb jazz musician and jazz teacher, he gladly participated in the *Salon Cimrman* project. Even though he had a serious heart condition and spent quite a lot of time in the hospital in the early eighties, he remains very active in both fields - *cimrmanology* and jazz music.

Vysočina, noviny Žďarska, 06.10.2005

S našim odchodem divadlo skončí, říká Zdeněk Svěrák. (When we leave, the Cimrman Theatre will no longer exist, says Zdeněk Svěrák).

Lenka Mašová

This interview with Zdeněk Svěrák is conducted in a way that suggests that Jára Cimrman was a flesh and blood individual and Smoljak and Svěrák just put all their effort to reconstruct and adapt for contemporaries the remains of the genius's masterpieces. Svěrák explains the importance of their work from the perspective of the whole nation and its heritage. He also says that there is no one who would be prepared to take over their responsibilities and continue the work of *The Cimrman Theatre*.

The Jára Cimrman Theatre

Here are the articles about the theatre activities, as well as about the published books and different projects which are associated with the theatre.

Magazine Dnes (19.06.1997)

Cimrman v Paříži aneb úspěch českých divadelníků v cizině (Cimrman in Paris - a success for czech theatre abroad)

by Karel Čech.

The first few paragraphs are written in the style of scientific report that gives a precise description of the weather and technical details of the journey. This style is very common to the *Jára Cimrman Theatre*: every stage play begins with a similar quasi-scientific yet subtly humorous tone and the subject matter is usually a report of the theatre crew's latest discovery of a great work by the forgotten genius. Then the author goes on to review the whole event. It is worth taking note of the comments on the audience of the play performed in Paris, both in terms of the description of their origin and their reaction to the performance. The author emphasised that the spectators consisted mostly of Czech nationals who live in France. These Czechs are described as being mostly students, workers of the Czech Embassy and the émigrés of 1948 and 1968; it is they who laughed most loudly at Cimrman's humour. The French minority in the audience, however, remained a little confused rather than amused. The author takes this reality as the basis for his conclusion that this very idiosyncratic sense of humour is deeply connected not only with a knowledge of the Czech language, but also with the Czech mentality as well as Czech history and culture. The article ends on the same humorous note with which it began.

Právo, 21.04.1998

Jára nezapře humor Cimrmanů. (Jára would not hide connection to Cimrman's sense of humour)

Radmila Hrdinová

This article deals with Smoljak's new activity called Studio Jára, with a short review on the programme prepared by the author and its reception by the audience. At the end, Hrdinová asks how long Smoljak estimates this idea will survive, and how different will it be from the traditional Cimrman Theatre.

Mláda fronta dnes, 11.06.1998

Které knihy se nejlépe prodávají (Which books are the bestsellers)

This is a list of the bestsellers in selected book stores in the Czech Republic. The book *Jára (da) Cimrman. Sborník o životě a díle českého polyhistora* is among the top selling books. The same book received a very good review in the magazine *Blesk* 27/98.

***Reflex*, 27/98**

This edition of *Reflex* contains some very interesting information with a short review of the newly published VHS tape of Cimrman's play *Záskok*. The details given do not reveal anything about the mystification – they suggest that Jára Cimrman was a real playwright.

***Divadelní noviny*, 2/99**

Jiří Šebánek

This is an open letter by Jiří Šebánek in which he tells of when *Salón Cimrman* was set up and how it withdrew from performance in 1989 as a method of protest against the old regime. Šebánek also announces that, after over nine years of silence, the show was to start again on the same radio programme on which it used to be broadcast.

***Tina*, 26/98**

Blaník. Divadlo Járy Cimrmana (Blaník¹⁵⁷. Jára Cimrman Theatre)

This contains a short appraisal of the videotape with the Cimrman's play *Blaník*. It briefly hints at the origin of the mystification of the Czech genius. However, in the magazine *Reflex*, 26/98, the same videotape is described without any

¹⁵⁷ *Blaník* it is a legendary mountain, inside of which a hidden army sleeps and will wake up to help the Czech nation when it will be in a real trouble.

explanation as to who Jára Cimrman is. The author of this short review introduces him as one of the authors of the play, along with Svěrák and Smoljak. This contrast illustrates the way in which some journals have chosen to fully embrace the mystification of Cimrman whilst others remain more apprehensive.

Ring 23/98

Cimrmanovo a smoljakovo dítě se má k světu. (Cimrman and Smoljak's child is growing heartily/well.)

This is an announcement about the new Ladislav Smoljak's theatre activity, called *Studio Jára*, which although continues the ideas of the mystified genius – Cimrman – also has certain differences, e.g. there are actresses (the original *Jára Cimrman Theatre* consists of men only).

Špigl, 17.12.1998

Svěrák ze Smoljakem křtili "to nejlepší z Cimrmana" (Svěrák and Smoljak were baptising¹⁵⁸ the "very best of Cimrman.")

This is a short piece about Svěrák and Smoljak signing their new book which contains "the best of" their work with a brief description of the book content. According to the article, the book is highly recommended even by demanding critics. It is further evidence of the enduring popularity that Cimrman's co-creators.

Mladá fronta dnes, 28.04.1999

Smoljakovo vážné téma v rouchu humoru a mystifikace (Smoljak's serious topic disguised in humour and mystification.)

Jan Kolář

¹⁵⁸ It is a custom in the Czech Republic to 'baptise' the new book or cd which are being introduced to the market.

This is a review of the most recent of Smoljak's plays, *Malý Říjen* (A little October). The review is written by the chief editor of the *Divadelní noviny* (Theatre news). He emphasises that even though Smoljak wrote this play outside the boundaries of the Cimbrian theatre, he nevertheless remained close to using mystification as a means of communicating with the audience. He also resists the use of professional actors, thereby maintaining a further similarity to the conventions of the Cimbrian theatre.

Mladá Fronta Dnes, 31.12.1998

Fanoušci Járy Cimrmana měli v letoším roce mimořádnou sklizeň. (The fans of Jára Cimrman had exceptional harvest this year.)

Zdeněk A. Tichý

The review of three books and two CDs which appear on the market: Zdeněk Svěrák, Jiří Šebánek, *Vinárna U Pavouka*, Jiří Šebánek, *Já, Jára Cimrman, To nejlepší ze Smoljaka, Svěráka a Járy Cimrmana*, and CDs: *Divadlo Járy Cimrmana: Švestka, Studio Jára: Hymna*.

Along with the review of all the media mentioned above, Tichý recalls a history of the Cimbrian mystification. Although he finds those books and CDs very good and worth recommending, he criticises the imperfection in the edition of the books – like missing descriptions of the enclosed pictures for example. He finishes the review with a comment that a great genius like Jára Cimrman deserves perfection and attention to the details. In that way he actively participates in the mystification.

Divadelní noviny, 12/2000

18.-31.05.2000

This theatrical magazine tells us about the exhibition in the *Originál* gallery which presents the life and work of Jára Cimrman. The article contains a quote by Svěrák who explains that the exhibition fulfils one of Cimrman's three dreams – the first and the second having both already come true. Apparently they were to perform on

the stage of National Theatre in Prague and to play Cimrman's masterpiece in the Rudolfinum concert hall.

Lidové noviny, 24.11.2000

Ladislav Smoljak přejmenoval Járu na Láďu a vydává občasník. (Ladislav Smoljak renamed Jára Lad'a and is publishing from time to time)

šv

The information about the changes in Smoljak's project. *Studio Jára* has been renamed *Studio Láďa*¹⁵⁹ and has been moved from *The Cimrman Theatre* building to Semafor Theatre. This move is seen as a move towards a more independent additional activity of Smoljak rather than a split among the members of the Cimrman theatre. Smoljak also announces his decision to publish a newspaper called *Večerní Láďa*, in which one can find an announcement about the opening of a gallery named *Galerie Láďa* in the main hall of the Semafor Theatre. This fictitious place is announced as exhibiting exhibit live famous individuals. In making these humorous announcements Smoljak, is essentially elaborating on the form of humour so well known thanks to the Cimrman theatre.

Divadelní noviny, 12/2000

My dialektice se neučili z Hegla, Smoljakove...(We didn't learn dialectic from Hegel, Smoljaks)

Josef Mlejnek

This is a review of Smoljak's new play *Fantom Realistického divadla Zdeňka Nejedlého* (*Phantom of Zdeněk Nejedlý's Realistic Theatre*) performed at the Studio Jára. The new play is an interesting example of the form called *theatre within a theatre*. Although Smoljak stayed quite close to the Cimrman genre in terms of mystification in his first Studio Jára play, this new play is quite independent of his Cimrman connections.

Tina, 24/2000

Smoljakova Hymna

¹⁵⁹ Láďa is, in Czech language, a diminutive form of a name Ladislav, similarly Jára states for Jároslav.

-bar-

A short article about the most recent stage play of Ladislav Smoljak, named *Hymna* (hymn).

Zemské noviny, 16.06.2000

A briefing from a new performance of *Studio Jára: Fantom Realistického Divadla Zdeňka Nejedlého*, which was directed by Ladislav Smoljak, who also acts in it

Jára Cimrman beyond the theatre

These are articles written in a way that suggests that the Czech genius was a flesh and blood individual. An audience is taking part in a creation his biography and events to celebrate him.

Cosmopolitan 7/98

Jára da Cimrman: Sborník o životě českého polyhistora (Jára da Cimrman: anthology/compilation about life of the Czech polyhistorian/polyhistorist).

This article is another brief description of a new edition of the Cimrman book. The author actively participates in the collective mystification by emphasising that the book reveals details of Cimrman's influence on Kafka and Einstein.

Radniční noviny 4/98

Návštěva u... Járy Cimrmana (Visit at... Jára Cimrman's)

Eva Horníčková

The article is a part of a monthly series presenting a close inspection of the lives and achievements of famous Czech individuals. Published for April Fool's Day, it introduces Jára Cimrman as a Czech genius, an important dweller of Prague 3 (a quartier or Prague), who unfortunately could not meet with the journalists in person. In the end it is Svěrák and Smoljak who give an interview on his behalf. They explain, in a most serious manner, why for Cimrman the first of April is a

day without humour and pranks, as well as his attitude towards Easter folklore customs.

This is an interesting example of an adaptation of the mystification, as both the journalist and the interviewers act as though Jára were a real person.

Zemské noviny 21.04.1998

Jára a jeho jogurt budou mít muzeum (Jára and his yoghurt are going to have a museum)

(roč)

This piece offers information on a museum dedicated to Jára Cimrman which will be open in the town of Česká Lípa. The project has been given the required support by the local city council. The museum will be devoted primarily to the yoghurt which was invented by the Czech genius during his visit to that very town. One of the directors of the local museum explains how the museum and the local government are planning to attract a greater number of people with this new cultural activity.

Slovo 19.10.98

Všichni účastníci běhu Járy Cimrmana proběhli cílem. (All participants in Jára Cimrman's run pass the finish line and kept going.)

This piece gives information about the Jára Cimrman running event, which took place in the town of Kladno on 18 October 1998. It is a humorous summary of the whole event, which also was designed in a style of undiscovered and unappreciated Czech genius: every runner had to wear country style clothes and a suitcase weighing at least one kilogram.

Týden 23/98

Astronomie. Jára Cimrman na obloze. (Astronomy. Jára Cimrman in the sky.)

-zm-

This article informs the reader of a satellite discovered in 1996 by the Czech scientist and named after the forgotten Czech genius – Jára Cimrman. This article is also based on the idea that every reader is already well aware of the Cimrman mystification.

Slovo, 17.12.1998

Prezident Havel napsal motto k Cimrmanovi (President Havel wrote a motto for Cimrman.)

This article briefs the reader on a very interesting event where the then-president of the Czech Republic wrote a motto for the appearance of the *Jára Cimrman Theatre* at the prestigious festival of the Czech culture in Belgium. The motto reads: *Jára Cimrman will outlive us all. Václav Havel*. The quotation will be the core feature of the Cimrman exhibition on one of Brussels' markets. The article does not mention anything about mystification, but instead describes Cimrman's great discoveries and his magnificent influence on the history.

Týdeník Květy 49/98

Událost. Internet ovlivnil Jára Cimrman. (News. Internet was influenced by Jára Cimrman)

kla

The article gives details about the awards given to the best Czech artists and creators by the internet-based *Gallery Artforum*. One of the guests at the award event was Zdeněk Svěrák, who explained in what way Jára Cimrman predicted the internet. Almost half of the article consists of the explanation of the work of the great forgotten genius and his input in the creation of a virtual web.

Story 33/98

Proč nemá Cimrman podobenku. (Why Cimrman does not have a effigy)

Oleg Homola

This piece gives information about the presentation of the master's unknown face at the exhibition of the photography of the magazine. The piece includes a comment from Peter Brukner, one of the Cimrman theatre's actors, who explains why there is no direct picture of Jára Cimrman. Apparently this is because Cimrman had a tendency to pose for pictures in a very large group of people and a long distance from the camera, as he considered himself as an integral part of humankind. The information is given in the Cimrman style and its sense of humour, and is based on the assumption that the whole idea of the forgotten Czech genius is very well known.

Haló noviny, 15.10.1999

Běh Járy Cimrmana (The Jára Cimrman run)

The article describes the Jára Cimrman run that took place in Kladno. Every participant had to have a special outfit and a suitcase. The runners were from 1 to 68 years old. An explanation of the fictitious character of the Czech genius is given along with the brief description of *The Jára Cimrman Theatre* and its main founders.

Very similar information is presented in the newspaper *Zemské noviny* (19.10.1999) in a short article entitled *Odkaz Cimrmana*. The only difference is that in this article offers no explanation of the origin of the Cimrman mystification. The whole event is presented as though it happened in the name of a flesh and blood national hero.

Haló magazin, 14.07.2000

Cimrman stále živý. (Cimrman is still alive)

Vojtech Lavička

This brief article consists mostly of pictures from an exhibition on the life and works of the Czech genius, as well as a short description of the opening event of the exhibition. The event referred to took place at the Prague main railway station, in *Originál Gallery*. The article does not explain the origins of Jára Cimrman and is based on the assumption that all readers are already familiar with the mystification of the forgotten Czech genius.

Hospodářské noviny, 13.06.2000

Smetanová Litomyšl přivítá také Cimrmana. (Smetana's Litomyšl welcomes also Cimrman)

Radka Tesárková

In her article, Tesárková gives details about the upcoming prestigious classical music festival, which is to take place in the Litomyšl palace. The most popular tickets – which sold out immediately – were those for the Cimrman Theatre. The theatre was invited by the director of the festival, Vojtěch Stříteský, who commented in a Cimrman style that from the very beginning of the festival's history he had a feeling that there is something missing – the forgotten Czech genius, Jára Cimrman.

Haló noviny, 07.06.2000

Cimrman na hlavním nádraží (Cimrman at the main railway station)

Jaroslav Vojtěch

This article deals with the exhibition on the life and works of the forgotten Czech genius Jára Cimrman, which is based in the Originál gallery at the main railway station in Prague. Aside from the short description of the exhibition itself, the author details the background of the mystification and explains how the idea has evolved over the past thirty-four years.

Mladá fronta dnes, 15.06.2000

Litomyšl chystá opery, oratoria i Cimrmana (Litomyšl prepares Operas, oratories and Cimrman)

(vd)

This article describes the forty-second edition of the annual classical music festival in a Palace Litomyšl in Prague. The author draws on a point of particular interest, which is that one of two most popular events is called *Cimrman v říši hudby* (*Cimrman in the land of music*). The rest of the article is concerned on the detailed programme for the upcoming event.

Večerník Praha, 26.06.2000

Politici, herci a sportovci na divokých vlnách Internetu (Politicians, actors and sportsmen on the wild waves of the Internet)

Jan Stránský

This article is based on a survey taken among Czech celebrities and is concerned with the advantages and disadvantages of using the Internet. One of the interviewed individuals is Ladislav Smoljak who, in his answer to various questions, shares the details of the latest discovery of Cimrman's participation in the invention of the Internet.

Týden, 29/2000

Jára Cimrman nebyl slepý, ale černý! (Jára Cimrman was not blind, but black)

Jan Šilpoch

This article consists mostly of pictures from the event that took place in Kaproun on 30.06.2000. The event, which was hosted by Ladislav Smoljak, was arranged for the opening of the memorial to Jára Cimrman. The genius had been forced to leave the train at that very place, as he had been travelling without a ticket.

Nedělní Blesk, 11.06.2000

Cimrmanova deska plave (Cimrman's memorial plaque floats on water)

(ČTK)

The short article about an event in Frymburk, where the memorial of Jára Cimrman was opened, (he supposedly visited the city in 1912). The memorial board is placed on the surface of the Lipno lake and supported buy a special buoy, close to the lake shores.

Večerník Praha, 12.06.2000

Another briefing from Frymburk and the event for remembering Cimrman's presence in the city.

Týdeník Květy, 23/2000

Doba Járy Cimrmana (Times of Jára Cimrman)

This article is about the exhibition *Doba Járy Cimrmana*, which presents inventions from the times of the forgotten Czech genius. The exhibition is open to the public and is based in the *Originál* gallery, at the main railway station in Prague.

Blesk - Praha, 06.06.2000

This is an article about yet another exhibition which presents life and work of Jára Cimrman as though he were a real person.