

EXCERPTS FROM SEMINARS

Andrew Roberts
Department of Political Science
Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60208
aroberts@northwestern.edu

The following seminars were chosen from several plays which I have not translated elsewhere. For the purposes of performance, the seminars are to a certain degree interchangeable. Though some are closely tied with the play to follow, others are only loosely related and can be substituted for one another.

The texts below are taken from the latest edition of the plays and may differ from earlier versions. See Ladislav Smoljak and Zdeněk Svěrák, *Divadlo Járy Cimrmana: Hry a Semináře – Úplně Vydání* (Prague: Paseka, 2009).

From "The Nude" (1967)

INTRODUCTION

Prof. Miloň Čepelka:

Respected friends, good evening.

The task has fallen to me to welcome you to today's performance dedicated to the life and work of the until recently unknown Czech genius Jára Cimrman. To those of you who are visiting our theater for the first time, I want to congratulate you at the same time. That you chose exactly this evening for your first acquaintance with the Master has two benefits straight off: First - the scientific symposium which precedes the play "The Nude" genuinely counts above all on an audience of beginners. It will offer you the most basic Cimrmanological information and that in an easily accessible form.

The second virtue of this evening is the composition of the scientific team. One can without exaggeration say that with several exceptions it consists of nothing but the top authorities in the field. They are: doctor of zoology Zdeněk Svěrák, a specialist on the Master's dramatic and artistic work, Professor Jaroslav Weigel, our expert on the technical aspects of Cimrman's inheritance, engineer Jan Hraběta, and finally professor of philosophy Ladislav Smoljak.

Doctor Hedvábný, the discoverer of Cimrman's inheritance, excuses himself. However he asked his cousin, Dr. Svěrák, incidentally a direct participant in the discovery, to stand in for him. Dr. Svěrák, a born storyteller, is I think a replacement at the least of equal value. I would ask the doctor to begin.

THE LIPTAKOV FIND

Dr. Zdeněk Svěrák:

The discovery, which Dr. Hedvábný rightfully considers the discovery of the century, occurred on February 23 at ten o'clock in the morning around the year 1966. I became an eyewitness of the event really by a fortunate coincidence. Dr. Hedvábný invited me to his country house on the very edge of the charming Jizerian settlement Liptakov because he decided that he would install a fireplace in it. I am one of the few people in our republic who has perfect pitch. Just as people with a certain heart defect are good dowsers, those of us with perfect pitch are good fireplace builders. And so by knocking on the walls in my cousin's country house I very soon marked the place where it would best to build a fireplace and I told Dr. Hedvábný right off: "Dig here, Evžen."

We dug into the wall several times and to our joint astonishment we ran into a thoroughly metal-sheathed trunk here which was already at first sight literally filled to bursting with something. Because it was on the former territory of the Sudetenland, Dr. Hedvábný insisted that we call the bomb defusal expert Štáhlavský. Štáhlavský came to lunch and

when he finished eating, he for safety blew the trunk to bits.

Fortunately Dr. Hedvábný always has his favorite tape recorder, the Sonet Duo, at hand. Thanks to that we have preserved a tape recording of the famous Liptakov explosion. I ask that it be played.

(A detonation sounds from the tape recording.)

That is it, friends! As we've heard, the charge was heavily oversized.

(Tape recorder - the explosion sounds again. Svěrák indicates to the sound technician that it is not necessary to repeat the explosion.)

That was the same explosion. As we've heard, the charge was heavily oversized.

(Tape recorder - the explosion sounds again. Svěrák is unsettled and indicates even more resolutely that he doesn't want the clip again.)

Thank you. As we've heard, the charge was heavily oversized.

(In this critical place, the scientist waits, fearful of another explosion. However it doesn't sound and Svěrák nods to the sound technician's room with satisfaction.)

Thank you...so the explosion was apparently copied over the whole reel. I don't know if that is technically possible... Mr. Engineer, is it possible?

(Hraběta unhurriedly stands up, strides over, and stands as if prepared for a longer elucidation of the problem.)

Hraběta: Yes, it is possible.

Svěrák:

I thank you. The charge was heavily oversized, so the cottage itself was slightly damaged. My cousin naturally believes that after some smaller repairs it will be a quite different structure. When the dust settled, it appeared that we had managed to destroy the extensive inheritance of an immensely talented individual whose significance and breadth of his spiritual range can be compared perhaps only to that of Leonardo da Vinci.

In the course of our investigations up to now, the Master's likeness caused us the greatest difficulties. The thing is that Cimrman on principle let himself be photographed only from a distance and mostly in groups. He didn't want to be depicted, as he said, "wie ein Einzelbegriff" - as an individual concept - because he always considered himself a component of humanity. If we then have any photographic material, then only of this type:

(The projector shows a snapshot of Berlin's Brandenburg gate; a large white arrow points to one of the miniscule pedestrians.)

Here is Cimrman captured at the Brandenburg gate. In profile. Another rare period snapshot is more interesting:

(The projector shows a rural house in front of which a large group of villagers has lined themselves up to be photographed as was common at the start of the twentieth century.)

Cimrman is not in this snapshot, but we see here the home of Dr. Hedvábný, understandably before the explosion. Cimrman then lived in this structure. In front of the house is the family of the former owner, the hat maker Lešner. On Lešner's left stands his older daughter Lenka who later married an emigrant from Plovdiv and on his right...

(The audience doesn't know which one is Lešner, let alone that his daughter appeared in the snapshot. Dr. Svěrák, however, doesn't waste his time by pointing them out.)

...yes, that is her, we see a younger Eliška. Today she lives in an old age home in Česká Třebová.

Cimrman, however, did break his principle. And with his own hands. Namely he prepared this self-bust.

(Svěrák crosses over to the bust.)

Dr. Hedvábný found it in the attic loosely tossed among fire-fighting equipment. It was in a very desolate state and is holding together like this only thanks to the meticulous care of the art restorer Prof. Trtílek. Notice his face. All the features are stripped off. Only the two eye sockets, the two nose holes, and the two chins are visible. That is the result of the unconscious vandalism of the hat maker Lešner. Lešner, not knowing that it was an artistic work used the bust as a block for hats. He was manufacturing so-called "Jizerian hummers"...

(The speaker shows one such hummer.)

...and he steamed them on the bust. Perhaps some of you would be interested in the etymology of the term Jizerian hummer. We believe that the name comes from the old Czech song "Why Does the Jizera River Hum". If I can't, friends, show you a clear snapshot of Cimrman's face, I would like at the conclusion of this lecture to show you at least a snapshot of the hat maker Lešner.

(The projector shows an oval-shaped portrait of a genial looking hat maker with an Austrian twirly mustache. Svěrák looks over at the person working the projector.)

You don't have a different snapshot there?

Projector: No.

Svěrák: So that's him, my friends!

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Prof. Miloň Čepelka:

Thank you, Dr. Svěrák. I would like to pick up on him on this point. On the unknown likeness of Jára da Cimrman. I would like to add that not only do we not know how the Master actually looked from up close. We don't even know his exact date of birth. That is to say, Jára Cimrman was often changing his personal data to confuse a series of epigones, con-men, and fakers who passed themselves off as him. And in truth, as we managed to find out, several of them became unhinged from this. Among them a certain Igor Zika.

(The projector shows Igor Zika whose chest is covered with a hundred hiking badges.)

This snapshot comes from the time when he was collecting badges.

According to our conservative estimate Jára da Cimrman was born in the interval between the years 1854 and 1872 and that in Vienna as the son of the Czech tailor Leopold Cimrman and the Austrian actress Marlen Jelinková.

(The projector shows a group photograph of the grandmother of Jára Cimrman with her children.)

In this rare snapshot is Cimrman's grandmother Irmgard Jelinková with her children. The girl on her left is Marlen, later the mother of Jára Cimrman, while the first boy on the right is Herbert Jelínek, later a well-known Viennese orthopedist who at the end of his life became a victim of the liquor of the same name.¹

Judging from the entries in Cimrman's diary, the Master didn't have an overly happy childhood. His father enrolled him in a Czech minority school in Vienna, while his mother - at the same time - enrolled him in an Austrian school. The boy was forced in the morning to visit lessons in the Czech language, in the afternoon lessons in the German language. He didn't even have time to properly eat lunch because he spent the lunch break literally running from one school to the other. And this half-heartedness later appeared in his manuscripts which are written in a mix of Czech and German, they are teeming with germanisms - and even czechisms. Exactly here spring the objections of the Austrian, Viennese professor Erich Fiedler to our considering Jára da Cimrman one of the Czech greats. Of course his genuine patriotic feelings are best attested to in my judgment by the last entry in his diary in which the Master explicitly displays his longing - now I will quote - "to see his homeland - Böhmen". And that is, I think, sufficiently revealing.

¹ A popular Czech liquor is called Jelínek.

Now I request an expert on the Master's dramatic work - Professor Jaroslav Weigel.

(Smoljak takes advantage of Weigel's standing up to sit in his chair.)

THE PHILOSOPHY OF EXTERNISM

Prof. Ladislav Smoljak:

Cimrman formulated his philosophical ideas as an attack on the bastion of extreme idealism - the philosophy of solipsism. A solipsist, as we know, claims: I exist, the surrounding world does not exist, it is only so much a figment of my imagination.

Against this thesis, Jára Cimrman placed his own thesis: the contrary is true, he said. The surrounding world exists and I don't exist.

And from this thesis, he then developed a philosophical system which he called very poignantly externism.

This bold idea aroused such opposition around the world that it was hastily decided to call a philosophical disputation to Basel at which Jára Cimrman would defend his philosophical teachings.

As his opponent was chosen Prof. F.C. Bohlen who was then considered the ace of world philosophy even though he was in essence just a cunning shopkeeper - which was his original occupation. He put to Cimrman a cunning question: how could, he said, a non-existent consciousness produce its own philosophy?

This question did its work. No one believed that Cimrman would know how to answer.

But Cimrman did answer. And he answered in such a way that nothing remained to the philosopher Bohlen than to run out of the hall with his pants around his ankles to the laughter of all those present. Perhaps I should explain why with his pants around his ankles... The thing is that F.C. Bohlen cut his suspenders. You might not understand this idiom, but back then there was a habit in philosophical disputations that anyone who lost a philosophical controversy cut his suspenders as a sign of his defeat. Jára Cimrman's brilliant reply entered so to speak the history of philosophy and you will find it in every larger encyclopedia under the heading "The Basel Reply". I cite from Čepelka's Encyclopedia. My colleague Mr. Čepelka was so kind and loaned me his encyclopedia.

"If I claim," said Jára Cimrman, "that only the surrounding world exists and I don't exist, it doesn't mean that I am not apparent at all in the external world. Existence and appearance are to wit two absolutely distinct things." And Jára Cimrman further compared the surrounding world to a sort of surface, in the center of which is a place where Jára Cimrman is missing. If you allow, I would explain it graphically. *(Takes a piece of paper with a hole.)* This surface represents the world. You see that Cimrman created here a - let's say a hole whose outline is clearly demarcated. That is obvious.

The process of thought in the external world you can imagine as a stretching and contracting of the surface. With this stretching and contracting the outline of the hole changes at the same time and this change again represents for us the thought process of the non-existent Jára Cimrman. From the mere description it is already obvious that both processes are mirror images: the expansion of the surface has as a result the shrinking of the hole and on the contrary - the contraction, shrinking causes the enlarging of the opening.

And in this place Jára Cimrman drew attention to an interesting consequence of his philosophy. It results in a logical contradiction here. Namely if Jára Cimrman claims that only the surrounding world exists and he doesn't exist, in the external world the idea holds - and thus objectively - in its mirror image: only he exists and the surrounding world doesn't exist. Thus - the philosophy of solipsism. The author really advocates the position which he at the same time overturns. At the time this provoked bewilderment. In the conference hall it was boiling like a cauldron. "How should we reconcile ourselves with this", the representatives of the philosophical center called from the back benches.

And Jára Cimrman answered: "To reconcile oneself with this, that is the eternal task of philosophy."

From “The Investigation of the Missing Class Register” (1967)

CIMRMAN’S SEXTET AND FUTURISM

Prof. Ladislav Smoljak:

Cimrman’s revolutionary pedagogical system stands on six foundational pillars. We have given them the working title ‘Cimrman’s Sextet’. I will first introduce all six principles.

- Principle 1: Futurism
- Principle 2: Separation of Information Flow
- Principle 3: Punishment of the Teacher by the Teacher
- Principle 4: Graphic and Shocking Fixation
- Principle 5: Extraverbal Communication
- Principle 6: Wood Brought to Life

Let’s begin by looking at the first principle - Futurism. Perhaps every teacher in an area as backwards as Galicia was in the former Austro-Hungarian Monarchy would be satisfied with teaching his students only the most basic practical skills. Not so Cimrman. Cimrman saw further. He knew that there would come a time when even in Galicia people would use the telephone. And what then? Accordingly, he taught his students not just the skills which contemporary life required of them, but also those that bore on, in his own words, “the brighter future of mankind”.

The daughter of the regional postmistress, Erika T., has preserved a stenographic record of how Cimrman taught his students to telephone. The dialogue, which Cimrman as a rule demonstrated with the cooperation of the school caretaker, I will now reproduce with the help of Professor Weigel.

Weigel: (*Into the telephone*) Hey you over there!

Smoljak: A correct beginning. Today, however, we merely say, "Hello."

Weigel: Telephonist Weigel here.

Smoljak: That’s the first beginner’s mistake. My telepartner is using redundant words which prolong what was at the time a quite costly conversation. Cimrman always stressed that as soon as we begin to use the telephone apparatus we automatically become telephonists. Every telephonist knows this and it is therefore unnecessary for individual telephonists during telephoning to constantly state that they are... telephoning.

Weigel: Weigel here.

Smoljak: Up to the word ‘here’, it was perfect. According to Cimrman we must always bear in mind the position of the person to whom we are telephoning. And when

we put ourselves in his position, we learn that it is really he who is HERE. Consequently, we may confuse him by this choice of words. Yes?

Weigel: Hello! Weigel there.

Smoljak: Hello! Smoljak there.

Weigel: Good afternoon, Mr. Smoljak. Do you have any walking sticks in stock?

Smoljak: Walking sticks I've got. How long a stick do you need?

Weigel: I need a walking stick (*stretches his arms wide*) about this long.

Smoljak: Now this is a unqualified mistake. It just won't do. Cimrman explained to his students that there would come a day when telephone booths would be a common sight. These booths would only be wide enough for a single standing telephonist. Any sort of wide gesticulation like this would cost him dearly. Try it again, Professor.

Weigel: I need a walking stick about this long (*shows a shorter length*).

Smoljak: That's right. Yes, we have one. Send a carriage over for it.

Weigel: Thank you.

Smoljak: My pleasure.

It remains to add only that according to Erika T's recollections Cimrman reputedly awakened such a passion for telephoning in his students that when the first telephone box was installed in the post office, it completely disrupted work there. "It was like some casino in Monte Carlo there," writes Erika T. "The coachmen threw their whole fortunes into the machines and dialed God's know what numbers and many then staggered out of the post office completely broke."

SEPARATION OF INFORMATION FLOW

Prof. Miloň Čepelka:

Let's take a look at the second principle of Cimrman's sextet, the Separation of Information Flow.

After years of teaching in Struk, Cimrman made a random screening of his former students' knowledge. The results were depressing. He found that they all remembered only a tenth of what he had taught them in school. Nine-tenths of the information was discharged. In layman's terms, it went in one ear and out the other. Cimrman thus decided to rationalize the process of remembering and forgetting once and for all. He directly specified material which the students had to remember and material which they

had to forget. The material for remembering occupied one-tenth of the class time and the material for forgetting nine-tenths, precisely according to his statistical research.

Cimrman introduced two terms for these two areas of the curriculum: forget-me-nots and remember-me-nots – in German, *Vergeissmeinnicht* and *Nichtvergeissmeinnicht*, in Russian *zabudka* and *nezabudka*. Students learned both. Of course they only had to remember the forget-me-nots. Through the use of highly sophisticated trick questions Cimrman then tested whether the students forgot the remember-me-nots.

PUNISHMENT OF THE TEACHER BY THE TEACHER

Dr. Zdeněk Svěrák:

What did the third principle, Punishment of the Teacher by the Teacher, mean in practice? The answer is simple: the teacher never punished the students for any sort of transgression, but always punished himself alone. Cimrman began with the assumption - recognized even by today's schools, albeit only theoretically – that students should like their teacher and thus should feel remorse when the teacher suffers. How did it work in practice? When the students, for instance, poured water into his inkwell, Cimrman didn't take a step out of his house for a week. During this time the students were left free and thus had plenty of time to feel sorry for him. On another occasion Cimrman responded to mischief with these words: "I'm not going to have a cigar after lunch today. Don't cry, you alone are to blame for it!"

EXTRAVERBAL COMMUNICATION

You well remember from your school days that any sort of arguing between the teacher and individual students disrupted your concentration on written assignments. During Cimrman's exams, however, the classroom was absolutely silent thanks to his system of extraverbal signaling. Cimrman and his students mastered a whole system of mimetic signs. We can best demonstrate his method with actual examples.

If, during written work, a student stood up with his hands clasped as if in prayer and tightly crossed his legs, the teacher knew that he wanted to say, 'Dear God, I've got to go.' The teacher in turn asked the students by means of hand gestures, "Number one or number two?" The student answered according to his needs.

There were even more difficult extraverbal messages. This (*he shakes his head*) is the sign for negation, prohibition. This (*he makes digging motions*) represents a shovel or other digging implement. And this (*he grasps his nose*) is the sign for any type of smell or for the olfactory organ itself.

The whole message thus reads: "Stop picking your nose."

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

Prof. Ladislav Smoljak:

Not long ago I discovered a letter in Einstein's correspondence in which Cimrman acquaints his friend with the definitive structure of Externism. He explains that according to this philosophy existing entities have a status exactly the opposite of what common sense says: an object is there where we believe it is not and it is not there where we believe it is. In the popularized version: if I hold this piece of chalk in my hand, for example, then, according to Cimrman, the chalk completely fills up the entire space surrounding the chalk and only in the place where you see it is the chalk not there. The entity which I hold in my hand is de facto just a kind of empty bubble in a continuous chalk mass. Such a description of the world seemed remarkable to Einstein - originally, he simply called Cimrman's opinions 'funny'. He did have objections though. I quote, "As a physicist I must alert you that on the basis of reality itself nothing changes if you call a THING EMPTY and empty surroundings a THING. It is merely a game with words." In the original, "The ping-pong with the words." So much for Einstein.

Before I acquaint you with Cimrman's response to Einstein's objection, I have to first mention the philosopher F.C. Bohlen whose name probably says nothing to you today. That's not surprising: he worked on philosophy only as a dilettante. He made his real living as a merchant - he owned a large drugstore in Essen. And he made a name for himself only because he was rude and even foul-mouthed to his customers. And so this vulgar materialist muddled his way into philosophy as well. And it is in opposition to Bohlen's theory of knowledge that Cimrman explains his own principles of knowing. I will cite from Cimrman's letter.

(Smoljak gradually creates the diagram below: with the help of magnets he attaches slips of paper with the individual concepts to a metal board.)

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

According to F.C. Bohlen
 TRUTH – unclear
 WE CLARIFY TRUTH
 WE KNOW EVERYTHING

According to J. Cimrman
 ERROR – clear
 WE REFUTE ERROR
 WE KNOW NOTHING

According to the vulgar materialist Bohlen, the fundamental basis of knowing is TRUTH, even though he admits that, at the start, it is UNCLEAR. Cimrman, against this, says that the fundamental basis of knowledge is ERROR which, from the beginning, is, of course, CLEAR.

As our knowledge deepens, we get the second stage of the knowing process in which according to Bohlen we CLARIFY TRUTH, whereas for Cimrman we merely REFUTE ERROR.

The final goal of our knowing is then, according to Bohlen, a state where truth is absolutely clear and WE KNOW EVERYTHING. For Cimrman at the end of the knowing process, error is quite refuted and WE KNOW NOTHING.

Of course, beware. I would be very displeased if you took Cimrman for some sort of agnostic or nihilist. He understands knowledge as a process which is in essence positive and through which we free ourselves from an initial error so that we can - in his own words - "stand before the face of the Almighty with our heads clear and empty." That in the end we know nothing is simply the logical result of his philosophy of Externism. In the process of knowing, as I demonstrated with the chalk, we get closer and closer to the place where the object is not. If we somehow reach the object itself, we don't find ourselves, as Bohlen claimed, at the heart of the matter, but instead we run up against a void. So at the close of the knowing process, we know nothing, but nevertheless we know it correctly.

The proverbial Cimrman contradiction (*Cimrmanischer Widerspruch*) again surfaces here: his theory of knowledge can be applied to all existence with one exception - and this is Cimrman's theory of knowledge itself. Applying the theory to itself leads to the contradiction: Either it is an ERROR, or WE DON'T KNOW.

Even here, however, Cimrman was resourceful enough to find a solution. Shortly before he pronounced his final sentence WE KNOW NOTHING, he made the so-called LATERAL STEP. With this step he stood - though only for a moment - on the ground of vulgar materialism from where he could recognize his own theory of knowledge as objective truth.

THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

According to F.C. Bohlen
TRUTH - unclear
WE CLARIFY TRUTH
WE KNOW EVERYTHING

← (LATERAL STEP)

According to J. Cimrman
ERROR - clear
WE CONFUSE ERROR
WE KNOW NOTHING

Cimrman then connected the conclusions of both theories by the so-called COLON OPERATOR which puts both opposing statements together, culminating in the famous philosophical statement: WE KNOW EVERYTHING: WE KNOW NOTHING.

Originally from “Murder in the Pullman Car” (1970)

WILL PRAGUE EVER HAVE A STATUE OF CIMRMAN?

Dr. Zdeněk Svěrák:

Esteemed friends, we gather today to acquaint you with the work of the Czech genius Jára Cimrman in the field of criminology.

But first, as chairman of the committee for building a memorial to Jára Cimrman, let me update you about our progress in this endeavor.

The first impulse in the statue project came from Dr. Bičík. A native of the Little Town Quarter of Prague, Dr. Bičík has been patiently trying to persuade the city government for twenty years now that Little Town Square – otherwise very beautifully planned – was missing something. One day he brought two postcards to a meeting of our committee for the commemoration of Jára Cimrman. One was older, from the days when the square carried the name of Marshal Radecký and when a giant statue of him stood at the head of the square. The second postcard was from the present. Careful examination of the two pictures forced us to admit that Dr. Bičík was correct, something was missing from Little Town Square in the second picture. It was a statue.

It seemed a matter of simple logic that in place of the monument to Marshal Radecký, that Czech collaborator with the Habsburgs, we should erect a monument to Jára Cimrman, who never helped the Habsburgs in any way. As we began to put this idea into practice, however, unforeseeable difficulties arose. First of all with the material. It's well-known that when Jára Cimrman left Prague for the last time and said farewell to his friend Trefný in Bohnice, he said to him, and these are his exact words, “Trefný, if Prague ever considers building a memorial to me, make sure that it's of white marble. In white it'll best stand up to the pigeons.”

Owing to the fact that our Cimrman association doesn't have the finances to afford a memorial made of such high-quality material, we sought out an ally. We found one in an organization which faced a similar problem. The editors of the magazine “Horse, Friend of Man” wanted to donate a statue of a horse to our capital. Their intention was more than praiseworthy. When you look around at the statues in Prague, which of our cultural icons sits on a horse? Saint Václav and Saint Jiří. But they're saints. There is Jan Žižka as well. Otherwise, Palacký is sitting on a chair. Jungmann is sitting on a chair. Jirásek on a stump. And Božena Němcová and Mánes are left to stand.²

² Saint Václav is the patron saint of the Czech lands. Saint Jiri is Saint George. Jan Žižka (1360-1424) was a military commander for the Hussites. František Palacký (1798-1876) was a historian who wrote the standard version of Czech history. Josef Jungmann (1773-1847) was a poet and philologist who helped create the modern Czech language. Alois Jirásek was the author of historical novels that are likened to Sir Walter Scott. Božena Němcová (1820-1862) was a novelist and collector of folktales. Josef Mánes (1820-1871) was a painter.

It was thus decided that Cimrman's statue would be equestrian. Objections from the "pedestrian wing" of our association who considered an equestrian statue ideologically dubious, because Cimrman apparently never sat on a horse and was in fact afraid of horses, were rejected. The majority of us believed that in this case a horse was within the bounds of artistic license. And the pedestrian wing ultimately had to acknowledge that. Our plan for an equestrian statue on a two-meter high pedestal, however, ran into another problem: the streetcar system. The Transportation Authority of Prague – and I will name the person in charge: it was deputy engineer Kudrna – didn't even want to discuss the reconstruction of the streetcar system.

And at this point Dr. Bičík came up with a compromise solution. In order for Jára Cimrman to sit on a horse and at the same time not to interfere with the guide wires for the streetcars, Dr. Bičík proposed the ford variant. The statue would portray Cimrman fording a river with the horse submerged in the pedestal, a sort of equine bust.

However, our friends from "Horse, Friend of Man" were against this proposal. They couldn't escape the impression that the animal was drowning and they recommended that Cimrman not sit on the horse, but that he lead it, which would radically lower the height of the sculptural group. At first glance this would work out well, but in reality it would mean that views of Cimrman from the northern side of the square would be completely blocked by the horse.

We thus had to abandon the site where Marshal Radecký originally stood (that is, on the streetcar platform) and look for an open space outside of the streetcar system. We found one on slightly more elevated ground that is home to a parking lot. And we were in luck. The parking lot attendant, Mr. Landa, didn't have anything against the proposal. However, he didn't have the courage to decide the matter himself. We thus have to discuss the whole matter with Dr. Brabec who relieves him.³

³ The subtle satire here is that a doctor is working in a parking lot, presumably because of his political opinions.

From "Cimrman in the World of Music" (1973)

AT KREIBACH'S MUSIC SCHOOL

Assistant Professor Petr Brukner:

...Mrs. Roza was Cimrman's inspiration for a number of love songs whose unique conception distinguishes them from all works of the genre both before Cimrman and after him. While the traditional love song praises the beloved, Cimrman's love songs criticize his loved one.

"To praise someone is no great art," writes Cimrman. "The real challenge is when we have critical reservations about our partner. Few have been able to express them in a way that doesn't offend the one we love. And herein lies the opportunity for the artist."

Cimrman gave his love songs for Mrs. Roza the pleasant sounding title "For the Little Widow" (perhaps under the influence of his favorite author Jindřich Šimon Baar). Let's present at least the more successful ones.

SEEING DOUBLE

Your two arms so white,
for me a pleasant sight.
Your two eyes so blue,
there is no better view.

Your two gentle ears
Even your two breasts
hang like chandeliers.
are always welcome guests.

But your two chins are something else.
You'd best leave romance to others.
When one chin to another gels,
love in its embrace smothers.

LOVE UNVEILED

When my beloved walks through town,
whether it's morning or afternoon,
all the tenants rush to look down.
Till she comes again is never too soon.
With a loud hoo-hoo,
they call out "hot stuff."
They'd stop at nothing
to see her in the buff!
If they only knew how her bones jut out,
then they'd lose all cause to shout.

From “Blaník” (1990)

CIMRMAN AND HISTORY

Prof. Miloň Čepelka:

To begin let me read a few historical dates:

August 26, 1278 – The Battle of Moravian Field

May 30, 1434 – The Battle of Lipany

August 24, 1572 – St. Bartholomew’s Day Massacre

June 21, 1621 – The Execution of Twenty-Seven Czech Noblemen

July 27, 1896 – The Fourth Congress of the Second International

You are probably asking yourselves what do all these dates have in common? What they have in common is that all of these dates are unrememberable.

As far as we know, Jára Cimrman is the only person to concern himself with the problem of the rememberability of historical dates. In the introduction to his book *History and Memory*, he posed the question: What is the function of an historical event? And he immediately answered: it has a double function. First: the event influences the course of history. Second: the event becomes part of the history curriculum.

Historians have a tendency to undervalue the second aspect, but Cimrman presented persuasive evidence that this second function is just as important as the first. If not more important. For example, what happened in 1775 at Chlumec nad Cidlinou? An army division drove several dozen smallholders into a lake. The event itself thus involved maybe a hundred individuals. As a history lesson called “The Battle of Chlumec,” however, this skirmish has tormented millions of students and teachers. We don’t know exactly how many farmers fell at Chlumec, but it was certainly fewer than the number of D’s received for not knowing this part of the curriculum.

“You have counted the fallen,” says Cimrman addressing historians, “but has anyone counted the hundreds of thousands of childhood traumas, family tragedies, school suspensions, corporal punishments, disciplinary proceedings with teachers, and suicides of school inspectors? No, sirs. An historical battle often causes greater damages in the textbook than on the battlefield itself.”

Cimrman’s meditations lead to a logical conclusion: politicians should consider not only the effect their actions have on history, but also their effect on students who are going to have to learn them. For important events that will go down in history, they should thus choose rememberable dates.

Cimrman subjected the emperor Ferdinand II to harsh criticism for the execution of twenty-seven Czech noblemen on June 21, 1621. He objectively recognizes that the choice of the 21st of June nicely corresponds with the 21st year of the century. At the same time, however, he asks: Would it have been such a problem for the powerful

Habsburg to execute six fewer noblemen? If it would have been, couldn't they have held the execution six years and six days later so that the number twenty-seven could appear three times: Twenty-seven executed on the 27th of June 1627. "If I were in Ferdinand's place," admits Cimrman, "I would have postponed the execution until the 30th of June 1630. True, a few more heads would have rolled, but there would have been a lot less rolling of heads in the classroom. And we should mainly worry about the children."

Let's grant Cimrman the truth. Why, in the case of the French Revolution of 1789 it would have sufficed to wait only one year until a round number.

But this doesn't just concern historic events. Even the birthdates of illustrious figures could be chosen more responsibly. In this connection, Cimrman appealed to parents with a high IQ for whom there was a risk of bringing a genius into the world to plan their pregnancies in this respect.

For example, the fact that Albert Einstein was born in 1879 wasn't a good testimonial to his parents. Little Albert in his school essay characterized his father as precipitous and even hot-headed.

As the year 1900 approached, Cimrman became more and more nervous. He felt that that in this memorable year as many world-historical events as possible should take place. And he pressured the leading men of his time to perform them. He wasn't always successful.

For example, his letter to the Emperor Franz Josef I, advising him to either step down or die in the year 1900, was received by the ruler with decided frigidity.

Not even his renowned letters to the Chinese Boxers fell on fertile soil. He wasn't able to delay their rebellion which broke out in the year 1899.

Among his successes, however, is the founding of the state of Australia. On his advice, the Australians founded their union on January 1, 1900 and, as we have since learned, the report cards of our friends down under are teeming with A's.

Cimrman helped Max Planck with his quantum theory so that he managed to publish it in the hoped for year of 1900.

His tour of Great Britain was successful as well when he spurred the hesitating English to the founding of the Labour Party.

Cimrman had the most work with Lenin. When Cimrman didn't succeed in dissuading him from publishing the magazine Spark with the warning telegram: "Watch out. From a spark come flames", he at least pressured him into its publication in the year 1900. Lenin managed it at the last moment in December. He exhausted him to such an extent, however, that – as Nadezhda Konstantinovna Krupskaya recalls – the Lenins never had such VYPRASKANY Santa Claus.

With regret we have to say that Cimrman's ideas haven't found a wider response even today. Let's take as an example the election of our new president: December 29, 1989. Who is going to remember it? If there was at least one Cimrmanologist among the deputies of the Federal Assembly to restrain the spontaneous eagerness of the old communist parliament to already have its favorite dissident in the Castle, it would be possible to delay his election for three days and our children could neatly learn: the first president after the fall of totalitarianism – January 1, 1990. A pity. Thank you for your attention.