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Copyright, Credits, and Write-for-Hire Creativity

Authorship and Authority in Czech Silent Screenwriting

Abstract

This article examines the professional status and creative labor of screenwriters in Czech silent cinema, using the 1926 adaptation of Ignát Herrmann's novel, *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara*, as a case study. Drawing on Jonathan Gray's and Matt Stahl's concepts, the research analyzes how work-for-hire practices and copyright defined creative control and artistic recognition, examining authorship and authority within regional "authorial clusters." The article reveals screenwriters' working conditions and their innovative contributions to cinematic storytelling and style under the constraints of corporate and contractual forces. In so doing, it uncovers overlooked work patterns and professional challenges faced by silent-era screenwriters, contributing new perspectives to regional screenwriting studies on authorship and creative labor in unique industrial contexts.

Keywords

Czech silent cinema, *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara*, regional screenwriting, copyright, work-for-hire creative employment

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When we study authorship and artistic creativity in filmmaking, especially in screenwriting, our analysis usually starts with the final film or the surviving script versions. We look at them through the lens of industry conventions, aesthetic norms, and production systems — the very things that shape, challenge, or are negotiated by the writer's creative choices. But what about areas of cinema that didn't operate within a clear, established system? What about places and times where collaborations and authorial contributions were worked out informally and varied wildly from one project to the next? The aim of this article is to offer some possible answers to this question by examining the relationship between authorship and authority in screenwriting practice within Czech silent cinema,

which represents one variant of the regional cinemas of the era that lacked robust film industry production structures. This paper will focus on the development of the popular Czech film *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* (Otec Kondelík a ženich Vejvara; Karel Anton, 1926) since it provides an excellent opportunity to explore the specific work on an individual project and the broader factors conditioning local screenwriting, with particular attention paid to the legal and contractual frameworks of creativity and employment that help to achieve the most complete and comprehensive picture possible.

February 18, 1926 has been largely overlooked by scholars, although it marks a pivotal moment in Czech silent cinema history.¹⁾ On this date, the Czech distribution company Biografia finally concluded a contract with the prominent local writer Ignát Herrmann and acquired the film rights for Herrmann's novel *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* and its sequel *Father-In-Law Kondelík and His Son-In-Law Vejvara*.²⁾ Biografia rightly viewed this agreement as a significant achievement, proudly publicizing it,³⁾ as the novel had become a bestseller since its initial publication in 1898.⁴⁾ In addition, driven by the novel's commercial success, Biografia found itself in a serious contest with several other film companies that were also attracted by the economic potential of a film adaptation and sought to capitalize on its distribution in a regional market.⁵⁾ Ultimately, closing the deal with Herrmann led to the development of the two-part picture that became one of the most successful local silent film projects and played a crucial role in defining key characteristics of Czech popular cinema during the interwar period. The creative process behind the development of this title was notably shaped by the organization and dynamics of the relationships between the distributor, the novelist, and the hired screenwriters with regard to negotiating the individual authorship, artistic credit, and public authority over the film product.

This research investigates the extent to which screenwriters in a regional film industry, heavily reliant on adapting popular local literature, enjoyed authorship and artistic autonomy, given the prominent role of film rights.⁶⁾ Furthermore, the research explores the degree to which their professional reputations and authorial credit were suppressed by intra- and inter-industrial forces. Examining the existing copy of the agreement offers an excellent opportunity to address these questions, bringing to light crucial aspects of screenwriting in Czech cinema. First, it reveals the active nature of the distributor's oper-

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- 1) Although the founding of Czechoslovakia united the inhabitants of the Czech lands, Slovakia, and Subcarpathian Rus into a single state, regular film production occurred only in Prague, the state's capital. There were no professional film studios in Slovakia, and less than ten feature films were made there during the entire silent period, all under rather improvised production conditions. As a result, film business activities were concentrated mainly in the areas of distribution and exhibition. Václav Macek — Jelena Pašteková, *Dejiny slovenskej kinematografie: 1896–1969* (Bratislava: Slovenský filmový ústav, 2017), 87–90; Eva Dzuriková, *Dejiny filmovej distribúcie v organizácii a správe slovenskej kinematografie* (Bratislava: FOTOFO, 1996), 6–29.
 - 2) "Contract with I. Herrmann," February 18, 1926, sign. III, inv. č. 27, k. 1, fond Sdružení kinomajitelů Biografia a. s., National Film Archive (NFA), Prague, Czech Republic.
 - 3) Anon., "V. karneval čsl. filmového herectva v 'Lucerně,'" *Český filmový zpravodaj* 6, no. 9 (1926), 2.
 - 4) Dagmar Mocná, *Případ Kondelík: Epizoda z estetiky každodennosti* (Praha: Karolinum, 2002), 25.
 - 5) Dagmar Mocná, "Kondelík a 'kondelíkovština,'" *Illuminace* 10, no. 4 (1998), 48–50.
 - 6) I would like to thank Coraline Refort and Yuki Irikura, my fellow collegians at Le Giornate del Cinema Muto, for the invaluable comments they generously provided on this article's manuscript.

ations in initiating the film's development, thus directing scholarly attention towards its role in shaping the composition of the local film production and in planning the output of the domestic cinema. Second, it suggests the fundamental elements of the central screen idea around which a cluster of creative forces formed, as well as the parameters of the entire film project, the fixation of which through a legal document became a priority for the involved parties. Third, the contract outlines the ways in which the mutual signing of the official document materialized the creative competencies, allocation of privileges, and types of artistic autonomy and authority related to adapting popular local literature for the screen. Collectively, these contractual features significantly conditioned both the position of screenwriters and the range of available creative options for exercising individual authorial contributions with regard to the film's style and narration.

Analyzing the development stage of *Father Kondelik and Bridegroom Vejvara*, this article aims to address various issues related to adapting the local best-seller which tells the story of Vejvara's courtship of Kondelik's daughter and, through a series of episodes, unfolds the relationship between the father and his future son-in-law, under the conditions of regional cinema. It explores the complex interplay between authorship and authority, as well as the collaborative and competitive dynamics within the screenwriting process of a specific project. This case study provides broader insights into the patterns, conventions, and principles of artistic and industrial practices in production cultures that are alternative to robust studio systems. In addition, using the case of *Father Kondelik and Bridegroom Vejvara*, the article delves into successful commercial and creative models, as well as the forms of collaboration and writing techniques behind such products. Considering the contractual dimension of writing for the screen, film authorship, and employing the screenwriting services, the paper also examines questions related to the division and management of labor as well as hierarchy and distribution of power within creative collectives. Moreover, it considers paratextual practices connected to claiming and assigning authorship credit, and the position of screenwriters vis-à-vis corporate regulations, intellectual property ownership's power, and the public image of the popular novelist.

Although this article explores screenwriting practices in adapting local novels for the screen, it does not primarily align with the objectives of adaptation studies. Instead of explaining the relationship between the literary source and the finished film, it is concerned with the impact of adapting domestic literature on screenwriting practices, types of creative work, and screenwriters' employment and working conditions. Hence, it mainly approaches the adaptation as a specific situation faced by Czech screenwriters under the conditions of regional cinema, illustrating broader issues of mediating authorship, authority, and artistic autonomy within creative collectives. Though adaptations were the most common case of such negotiations in the local environment, dealing with external "non-writers" was not unusual for screenwriters when developing screenplays for historical dramas and biopics (e.g., historians and clergymen in the development of *St. Wenceslas* / *Svatý Václav*; Jan S. Kolár, 1930/)⁷⁾ and star vehicles. Thus, it adopts the perspective of Eva Novrup Redvall and Claus Tieber and examines the adaptation as a condition of collabo-

7) Martin Kos, "Too many hands: A bureaucratic screenwriting for the Czech silent national epic *Svatý Václav* (St. Wenceslas) (1930)," *Studies in Eastern European Cinema* 12, no. 2 (2021), 121–135.

rative creative practice which required screenwriters to find and solve assigned artistic problems within limits imposed by agents with greater decision-making power in screen idea development.⁸⁾ For this purpose, I follow a relatively broad copyright definition of adaptation, presented by Jack Boozer, as a “derivation that recasts, transforms or adapts a previous work,” one that significantly affects individual artistic choices concerning narrative and style, and collective dynamics.⁹⁾

Consequently, the article demonstrates that studying often overlooked issues of contracts, copyright, and employment regimes provides an opportunity to rethink important industrial configurations and inter-medial relationships in film environments rooted in different types of sociocultural traditions and business models. Therefore, this article contributes to regional screenwriting studies by proposing a novel way of analyzing screenwriting creativity and authorship in cinemas operating under diverse industrial logics. Specifically, it highlights the value of examining screenwriting through legal documents and employment records to illuminate the work and profession of screenwriters in silent-era production cultures, which often lacked institutionalized production and administration, leading to fragmentary archival sources and making other types of historical research challenging.¹⁰⁾

Examining Authorship and Work Conditions in Regional Screenwriting

The proposed approach to analyzing the development of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* and conceptualizing local creativity is primarily rooted in the scholarly framework of the poetics of regional cinemas. This research approach is based on the premise that films produced in regional cinemas, such as Czech cinema, cannot be fully understood using concepts derived from the examination of the aesthetic output of strong film industries such as Hollywood or French cinema. In fact, regional cinemas do not principally absorb the stylistic and narrative norms of transnationally dominant productions, but rather draw from long-term cultural and creative traditions prevalent in a given region across diverse media and art forms.¹¹⁾ Correspondingly, regional cinemas are characterized by their own unique logics of labor organization, employment agreements, production models, and types of creative collaboration. For instance, to understand their speci-

8) Eva Novrup Redvall, “Scriptwriting as a creative, collaborative learning process of problem finding and problem solving,” *MedieKultur: Journal of Media and Communication Research* 25, no. 46 (2009), 34–55; Claus Tieber, “A story is not a story but a conference: Story conferences and the classical studio system,” *Journal of Screenwriting* 5, no. 2 (2014), 225–237.

9) Jack Boozer, “Introduction: The Screenplay and Authorship in Adaptation,” in *Authorship in Film Adaptation*, ed. Jack Boozer (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008), 13.

10) In many ways, this is also the case of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara*. Not only is there a shortage of primary archival sources with regard to the film’s production, but we also lack direct comments on the creative process and final product from the writer and filmmakers. To my understanding, neither the novelist nor the screenwriters publicly expressed their (dis)satisfaction with the adaptation. However, Herrmann continued to sell the adaptation rights for his other novels after the adaptation’s release, and the screenwriters accepted other adaptation commissions in the late 1920s and the early 1930s.

11) Radomír D. Kokeš, “Česká kinematografie jako regionální poetika,” *Illuminace* 32, no. 3 (2020), 13–14, 22–24.

ficity, it does not seem productive to apply Janet Staiger's findings on the corporate mechanisms of development, detailed division of labor, long-term in-house employment, or screenwriter specialization in the Hollywood mode of production, since Czech cinema never came close to achieving such a level of professionalization and standardization within which local screenwriters would perform their creative work.¹²⁾

The production practices of Czech cinema, which shaped the conventions of artistic work in the spirit of Howard Becker's thinking,¹³⁾ were distinctly different even from those of major European film industries. At least for a certain period of the silent era, the film-making practices in countries like Germany, Denmark, Italy, Sweden, France, and the Soviet Union were connected to the activities of large companies and institutions. There, creative possibilities were more firmly defined by corporate strategies and interests, long-term processes, and official structures. Although the position of screenwriters was largely limited within the production machinery of these cinemas (whether in configurations resembling the Hollywood director-unit system or the central producer system), the types of working methods, division of labor, and power hierarchies were — despite some internal variations — fundamentally stable. This stability contributed to the long-term development of corporate activities, simultaneous work on multiple film projects, more predictable planning, and more efficient execution.¹⁴⁾ Consequently, top-down corporate interests and demands, though not always in a favorable form, were significantly reflected in the daily reality and working conditions of screenwriters.

When considering screenwriting work under regional conditions, contrasting patterns, conventions, and practices of Czech cinema come to the fore. Despite local filmmakers' stated desires for greater centralization of domestic capital and local companies — which would have contributed to higher aesthetic standards and stable employment for creative talent — the development and production of films in the Czech film industry was determined primarily by short-term project management, not by strong, long-term corporate management.¹⁵⁾ This was dominant in the first half of the 1920s, but remained present until the end of the silent era. This outlined project-based production, therefore, typically contributed to creating temporary work collectives, a package-driven assembly of financial, human, and technical resources, or the informal nature of semi-permanent

12) David Bordwell – Janet Staiger – Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 134–140.

13) Howard S. Becker, "Art as Collective Action," *American Sociological Review* 39, no. 6 (1974), 767–776.

14) Kristin Thompson, "Early Alternatives to the Hollywood Mode of Production: Implications for Europe's Avant-Gardes," *Film History* 5, no. 4 (1993), 388–401; Anne Bachmann, *Locating Inter-Scandinavian Silent Film Culture: Connections, Contentions, Configurations* (Stockholm: Acta Universitatis Stockholmiensis, 2013), 228–249; Isak Thorsen, *Nordisk Films Kompagni 1906–1924: The Rise and Fall of the Polar Bear* (East Barnet: John Libbey, 2017), 143–145; Silvio Alovio, "The 'Pastrone System': Italia Film from the origins to World War I," *Film History* 12, no. 3 (2000), 252–254; Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 7–22; Hans-Michael Bock and Michael Töteberg, "A History of UFA," in *The German Cinema Book*, ed. Tim Bergfelder (London: Bloomsbury, 2020), 285–296.

15) For instance, in 1922, the ambitious Czech screenwriter and director Jan S. Kolár formulated the idea of merging domestic capital into one or two "super production companies," believing their existence would enable the development of local practices in a form that conspicuously resembled the Hollywood director-unit system, a counterpart of which also operated in German cinema, with which Kolár was well acquainted. Jan Kolár, "Práce v českém filmu," *Film* 2, no. 2 (1922), 3.

work groups. Such a bottom-up configuration, where creative efforts were generally focused on one film after another across different production firms rather than on simultaneous operations within a single institution, inevitably affected how screenwriters navigated their professional careers and the types of negotiations they had about authorship and authority in relation to the loosely defined boundaries of the division and organization of labor and decision-making hierarchies.¹⁶⁾

As most Czech pictures originated from temporary film projects with creative teams that disbanded after shooting, individual roles, creative competencies, and personal responsibilities were frequently being re-arranged and re-negotiated. In this respect, Ian W. Macdonald's concepts of *screen idea* and *screen idea work group* (SIWG) are particularly useful. Due to the project-based nature of the Czech film industry, development was frequently determined by a proposed individual feature film idea, whether written or pitched orally. This idea became the key initial point of the subsequent project and the core of the artistic endeavor. This led to the formation of a SIWG, comprising diverse members who shared the screen idea and collaborated on its development.¹⁷⁾ Once the screen idea was transformed into the final product ready for release, these collectives usually dissolved. This configuration, thus, significantly impacted the development of these films, the relationships between screenwriters and other collaborators, and the very nature of the screenwriting process itself. Given the constant re-assembling of labor within the outlined regional film industry, it is crucial to analyze each project individually, examining its unique work organization and collaborative structures. Such an approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the division of labor, the hierarchy of power, and ultimately, the complex dynamics and tensions between authorship and authority.

Regarding the issues of authorship and screenwriting labor in project-based Czech silent cinema, I take great inspiration from Jonathan Gray. His approach redefines authorship by adding a temporal dimension, urging us to examine the numerous figures and institutions involved in authoring an audiovisual work across its lifespan. In this respect, Gray highlights collectivity, authorship, authority, power, and labor management. Ultimately, instead of a single author, Gray proposes "authorial clusters" — multiple nodes of authorship operating at specific times within a film's lifecycle.¹⁸⁾

Within these clusters, Gray notes the authorship is constantly under negotiation. This notion encourages us to examine the social tensions, power differentials, management, and collaboration between authors as well as to look more closely to the interactions between authors of the "same" film and to production cultures. From Gray's perspective, authorship "is not only about meaning, but also, and importantly, about authority, control, and power, [the] question of 'when?' requires that we also ask 'how?' Who gives authority? Who claims authority? And how is authority managed, distributed, hoarded, and

16) Martin Kos, "Hra o svatováclavský velkofilm: Producentké přístupy a funkční proměny audiovizuálních představ ve vývoji Svatého Václava (1926–1929)" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Masaryk University, 2024), 18–27, 68–72.

17) Ian W. Macdonald, *Screenwriting Poetics and the Screen Idea* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 4–5, 11.

18) Jonathan Gray, "When is the author?," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, eds. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 88–111.

shared? How, too, is it effectively challenged, taken away, and contested?”¹⁹⁾ By systematically answering these questions, it is possible to both provide a more comprehensive explanation of the origin of specific choices and decisions made at a particular time and place in relation to individual films, and also more accurately describe the general nature of project-based film production and explain the particular SIWG dynamics. This is because it helps to identify institutions and individuals, such as distribution companies or renowned novelists, who, under certain circumstances, possess the authority to demand and enable certain choices, or conversely, to restrict and prohibit them.

One of the characteristic features of the outlined regional production culture was that above-the-line workers operated as freelancers, typically participating in film projects on the basis of work-for-hire contracts.²⁰⁾ Since filmmakers did not operate under permanent or long-term in-house contracts, but rather the financial or creative conditions of their work were the result of individual negotiations with employers for each project, contractually defined relationships between independent contractors and corporations significantly conditioned labor procedures as well as the limits of authorship and creativity. In this regard, I adopt the perspective of Matt Stahl who concentrates on the aspects of working conditions, copyright, corporate contracts, and other legal frameworks in media industries while examining the issue of authorship.

Exploring the working conditions related to work-for-hire agreements as typical legal configurations for employing creative workers, Stahl suggests that “authorship is not a simple function of creativity: copyright’s doctrine of ‘work for hire’ allocates authorship and ownership of intellectual property produced in the workplace to employers, alienating employee media workers and also enabling the dispossession of most freelancers.”²¹⁾ Moreover, he points out that the work-for-hire model designates employers as authors, even though these employers might lack any traditional creative talent and could even be corporations rather than individuals.²²⁾

To examine authorship and creativity with respect to screenwriters operating in film industries characterized by project-based production and work collectives organized around these projects through a work-for-hire employment regime means two things. One, we need to explore the extent and intensity of the bargaining power with which screenwriters achieved artistic autonomy and certain types of privileges in decision-making about the aesthetic aspects of the developed picture in each project in relation to the remaining stakeholders. Two, it draws our attention to their position and role in the process of granting and distributing authority over the screen idea and in communicating the authorial contributions towards audiences in the context of product ownership and corporate interests. The limits and opportunities that affected both exercising and claiming the authorship of screenwriters and the recognition of their professional position within

19) Ibid., 107–108.

20) Jan S. Kolár, interview by Jaroslav Brož, Zdeněk Štábala, Myrtil Frída, Luboš Bartošek, and Stanislav Zvoníček, n. d., Oral History Collection, NFA, Prague, Czech Republic.

21) Matt Stahl, “Privilege and Distinction in Production Worlds: Copyright, Collective Bargaining, and Working Conditions in Media Making,” in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, eds. Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks, and John T. Caldwell (New York: Routledge, 2009), 55.

22) Ibid., 56.

business structures were thus manifested in the types of contracts and agreements entered into, as Stahl outlines:

Rhetorically, authorship begins in the personality; however, socially, politically, and economically it culminates and is fully certified in the hiring, organization, and management of capital, facilities, technological resources, and, finally, labor services. Authorship is anchored in the control of the labor processes and the legal structures that condition the relations between hiring and hired parties.²³⁾

Industrial Shifts and Impact of Adaptations on Screenwriters

The development of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* as a potential regional box office hit, addressing both local urban and rural audiences, as well as its later great revenues in movie theatres benefited from favorable industrial shifts and business consolidation that occurred in Czech cinema in the mid-1920s. Recovering from a production crisis in 1923–1924 when the amount of produced Czech films significantly dropped due to several economic and industrial factors,²⁴⁾ members of the domestic film community were encouraged to further creative endeavor by the positive results of their recent output. The film journalist Quido E. Kujal, for instance, reported on a significant popularity of several adaptations of local literary sources among the domestic population during 1924 and saw in their commercial success an opportunity to increase the overall volume and financial potential of Czech films.²⁵⁾ Later testimony attributed a similar effect to *White Paradise* (Bílý ráj; Karel Lamač, 1924), starring Anna Ondra and Karel Lamač, which, despite its modest production costs, broke through to the German market, where it achieved unexpectedly positive results. This film's success not only allowed the duo Ondra–Lamač to expand their careers to Berlin, but it also manifested to Czech entrepreneurs that even a picture created under regional conditions can function as a good business commodity able to more than return the invested capital.²⁶⁾

In the following year, the demonstration of the profitability and competitive position of Czech film production in the local market was further strengthened by two highly successful film adaptation projects: *Into the Genteel State of Life* (Do panského stavu; Karel Anton, 1925) and *The Wedding of Nanyinka Kulichová* (Vdávky Nanyinky Kulichovy; Miroslav J. Krňanský, 1925). The former was based on the novel by Popelka Biliánová, the most popular Czech female writer of the period and Herrmann's female counterpart in the regional genre of idyllic literature. This genre drew heavily on vernacular culture and often

23) Matt Stahl, *Unfree Masters: Recording Artists and the Politics of Works* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 207.

24) Michal Večeřa, "Na cestě k systematické filmové výrobě: Rozvoj produkčního systému v českých zemích mezi lety 1911–1930" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Masaryk University, 2018), 21, 70.

25) Quido E. Kujal, "Příhodná doba," *Český filmový zpravodaj* 5, no. 10 (1925), 1.

26) Kolár, interview by Brož, Štábla, Frída, Bartošek, and Zvoníček; Václav Wasserman, "Pro film zrozený," in *Karel Lamač: Filmový režisér, herec a technik*, ed. Václav Wasserman (Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1958), 32–34.

featured stories set in an idealized past.²⁷⁾ The latter marked the very first film adaptation of any of Ignát Herrmann's literary works. As the title suggests, the story revolves around the preparations for the wedding of the central female character, Nanyňka Kulichová, and the efforts of her parents and supporting characters to ensure a perfect wedding day. While the filmmakers behind these projects managed to acquire the rights to both novels for low prices,²⁸⁾ the combination of the authors' renowned names and the casting of popular local stars, with Antonie Nedošínská being particularly effective in her roles as good-natured mothers, attracted large numbers of local spectators.²⁹⁾

Although domestic literature constituted one of the frequent sources of Czech film production in the previous period (until 1923, it accounted for approximately a quarter of the utilized source material), the years 1924–25 became a turning point and for the rest of the silent era, with almost a 50% share in production, it turned into the dominant domestic model.³⁰⁾ With the growing interest of film circles in popular literary or dramatic works and the endeavor to replicate successful formulas, several crucial aspects of the filmmaking practice came to the fore:

- the price of rights and other conditions specified by adapted authors (or their heirs), derived from the previously demonstrated profitability of their individual works in the market;
- locating and accumulating, within the constraints of the regional film industry, sufficient financial capital to acquire the highly demanded rights and manage the subsequent execution to achieve marketable products;
- the ability to staff each temporary film project with a highly skilled team possessing the necessary technical and creative expertise;
- the efficient management of power crucial for effective coordination of hired personnel, the efficient utilization of purchased/rented equipment and production values, the distribution of specific tasks, and the division of labor in the development of central screen ideas.

While the production sphere continued to face the problems of an underfinanced and highly decentralized structure, resulting in numerous small production companies operating primarily on the basis of short-term and irregular operations and transactions,³¹⁾ the economic stability and prosperity of the distribution sector enabled well-established distribution companies to initiate new projects and, therefore, exert a more significant influence on the production and tailor it to their business interests. In 1927, Jan S. Kolár commented on this shift in the local industrial organization quite positively:

27) Mocná, *Případ Kondelík*, 62–154.

28) Mocná, "Kondelík a 'kondelíkovština,'" 50.

29) The November advertisement for *The Wedding of Nanyňka Kulichová* proudly announced that the picture was, just in a couple of months since its release, already seen by more than 110 thousand patrons. *Český filmový svět* 3, no. 12 (1925), 10 [Advertisement for The Wedding of Nanyňka Kulichová].

30) Večeřa, "Na cestě k systematické filmové výrobě," 107.

31) *Ibid.*, 72–73.

Since that time [1925–26], *the domestic film production has been operating on a more viable commercial basis*. In most cases, production has been financed by business companies (film distributors), resulting in significantly higher sales compared to previous years. Moreover, cinema owners, especially those operating in the countryside, are able to attract larger audiences when Czech pictures are on their program and they cheer for the growth of the domestic production *since it is lively in absolutely every way*.³²⁾ [Emphasis in original]

In alignment with Kolár's remarks, we find, for instance, a brief note on the planned production of an adaptation of František Langer's play, *Getting a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle* (Velbloud uchem jehly; Karel Lamač, 1926). It announced that the production firm Bratři Deglové, with the playwright's involvement in writing the scenario, would produce the picture on demand of the distribution company Kinema.³³⁾ Apart from Biografia's operations, which are documented by references to their development and production of another Herrmann adaptation — *The Story of One Day* (Příběh jednoho dne; Miroslav J. Krňanský, 1926) — mentions of distribution companies involved in developing screen ideas exist also for these Czech projects: *A Self-Willed Girl* (Svéhlavička; Rudolf Měšťák, 1926), initiated by Republicfilm (with production credited to Favoritfilm); *Military Secrets of Prague* (Válečné tajnosti pražské; Václav Kubásek, 1926) and *Mrs. Katynka from the Egg Market* (Paní Katynka z vaječného trhu; Václav Kubásek, 1927), both linked to the distribution company Iris Film (though production is credited to Vraný Kubásek Michálek Praha and Elekta-Journal, respectively); *In the Summer Place* (Na letním bytě; Vladimír Slavínský, 1926), associated with the distribution company Lloyd Film (officially credited to Bratři Deglové); and *Řina* (Jan S. Kolár, 1926), allegedly filmed by Reiter for the distributor Elektafilm.³⁴⁾

As the following sections will elaborate in greater detail, these historical traces fundamentally challenge the previous understanding of the relationships and industrial dynamics between the fields of production and distribution in regional cinema. While the financial participation of distributors in covering the costs of certain film projects has been already known, the historical narrative has primarily emphasized the operations of production companies which, to secure funding for their pictures in the making, contacted the distributors and negotiated with them for advance payments on future distribution rights.³⁵⁾ Apparently, this kind of interpretation is inaccurate, as distribution companies were undoubtedly not just passive buyers that engaged with filmmaking processes in their later stages and did not care about individual film products and their aesthetics until they were almost finished. On the contrary, Czech distribution companies were active in initiating the development of screen ideas they were interested in, made investments necessary to launch the projects connected to a specific film title, and commissioned production

32) Jan Kolár, *K filmu* (Praha: Fechtner, 1927), 126–127.

33) Anon., "Co nového v českém filmu," *Český filmový zpravodaj* 6, no. 16 (1926), 3.

34) Anon., "Co nového v českém filmu," *Český filmový zpravodaj* 6, no. 36–37 (1926), 4; Anon., "ČESKÝ FILM," *Český filmový svět* 4, no. 3 (1926), 12; J. Snížek, "Řina," *Filmová hvězda* 1, no. 7 (1926), 2; Anon., "Biografie," *Film* 6, no. 2 (1926), 11.

35) Večeřa, "Na cestě k systematické filmové výrobě," 114.

companies to execute given screen ideas according to their conditions. Within the context of long-term business planning, this strategy was instrumental for distribution companies to incorporate individual titles into their distribution catalogs, with the assumed functions these films were intended to fulfill (e.g. to serve as vehicles for the method of block booking).

The growth of this hands-on approach exercised by distribution corporations and their representatives toward film development, especially adaptations, against the regional backdrop of the industrial reconfiguration, inevitably affected screenwriters' professional lives and screenwriting practices. On the one hand, freelance screenwriters seemingly benefited from the industry's inclination towards commercially viable adaptations of domestic popular literature. This trend provided them with significantly more employment opportunities, allowing them to hone their craft, develop their individual screenwriting techniques, and contribute to sustaining shared aesthetic standards in terms of narrative and stylistic conventions. Therefore, it enabled the screenwriters to minimize the unfavorable effects of the precarious working conditions and validate their professional status in the local environment.

On the other hand, this situation changed their role in the development stage and position in the hierarchy of power within project-based collectives. In contrast to the previous period, where screenwriters often acted as solitary project initiators, with their own original screenplays at play, and were able to hold and perform a significant degree of control in the decision-making process,³⁶⁾ they transitioned into screenwriting service providers, largely commissioned to adapt local literature for the screen within the constraints of corporate interests.³⁷⁾ Consequently, due to the work-for-hire arrangements and copyright matters, their bargaining power became limited and they were usually denied public recognition as authors, with the focus instead placed on promoting the names of the original book authors.³⁸⁾ All these factors significantly intersected during the development of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara*, resulting in the interplay of Biografia's distribution corporate logic, the commissioned service production company Elekta-Journal's agenda,

36) Kos, "Hra o svatováclavský velkofilm," 20–26.

37) These conditions are eloquently illustrated by Radomír D. Kokeš's reconstruction of the collaboration between the director Karel Lamač and the screenwriter Václav Wasserman while adapting Jaroslav Hašek's famous novel *The Good Soldier Svejk and His Fortunes in the World War* for the screen in 1926. Radomír D. Kokeš, "Kinematografický výskyt Josefa Švejka aneb Osudy románových taktik ve třech adaptacích s jednou britskou zacházkou," in *Fikce Jaroslava Haška*, ed. František A. Podhajský (Praha: Ústav pro českou literaturu AV ČR, 2016), 281–288.

38) Problems related to professional status, working conditions, and public visibility were by no means unique to the situation of Czech silent-era screenwriters. On the contrary, these challenges were also encountered by their peers in Hollywood, Great Britain, or France when adapting literature for the screen, as the production/distribution companies regularly decided to promote the names of novelists or playwrights instead of attributing the credit to screenwriters. See, for instance, Steven Price, *The Screenplay: Authorship, Theory and Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1–5; Ian W. Macdonald, "Screenwriting in Britain 1895–1929," in *Analysing the Screenplay*, ed. Jill Neldes (London: Routledge, 2010), 60–61; Annie Nissen, *Authors and Adaptation: Writing Across Media in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024), 157–200; Andrew Watts, "The currency of adaptation: Art and money in silent cinema," in *The History of French Literature on Film*, eds. Kate Griffiths and Andrew Watts (New York: Bloomsbury, 2021), 19–62; Janet Staiger, "'Tame' Authors and the Corporate Laboratory: Stories, Writers, and Scenarios in Hollywood," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* 8, no. 4 (1983), 41–43.

the novelist's personal concerns, and artistic choices mediated within the screen idea work group.

Adapting Kondelík: Permission Granted, Authorship Denied

Several key aspects of exercising authorship, asserting authority over the development of the central screen idea, and conditioning the screenwriting practices, were defined long before the adaptation process itself began. In addition, these aspects were, within the structures of the regional film industry, negotiated outside the field of above-the-line personnel, with whom film authorship is typically associated.³⁹⁾ At the very outset of the project, marked by the conclusion of the rights acquisition agreement, a crucial confrontation emerged between the distribution company and the novelist regarding the extent of their future authority over the film. Correspondingly, the official contract explicitly defined the limits of their respective competencies and obligations, within the context of their bargaining power, concerning specific attributes of the project. This resulted both in establishing the initial set of artistic constraints and other types of conditions for the screenwriting creativity and outlining the hierarchy of power in the decision-making process with regard to seeking cinematic solutions suitable for the given adaptation and executing particular choices while dealing with specific artistic problems related to the narration and style. Biografia had formally committed to fulfilling the following points:

I.

Mr. Ignát Herrmann gives the other contracting party his consent to film his books: Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara and Father-In-Law Kondelík and His Son-In-Law Vejvara, For this right to use the author's artistic work for the Czechoslovak Republic, the Association of Cinema Owners 'Biografia', a joint-stock company in Prague, paid Mr. Ignát Herrmann before signing this contract

CZK 100,000 (one hundred thousand). [...]

II.

In the interest of the artistic execution of the film, [Biografia] unconditionally submits to the fact that Mr. Ignát Herrmann, after submitting the libretto, photographs, performers, text of the titles and communicating the method of advertising, will decide on their admissibility for the execution of the film and that further Mr. Ignát Herrmann will be allowed to monitor the filming and that the actors must submit to his instructions both in terms of performance and masks and that changes or adjustments must be made to the film, which Mr. Ignát Herrmann considers necessary from an artistic point of view. [...]

39) John T. Caldwell, "Authorship Below-the-Line," in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, eds. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 349–351.

V.

Mr. Ignát Herrmann grants the operating right to [Biografia] for a period of 5 (five) years, i.e. from the date of completion of the production of the films *Father Kondelík* and *Bridegroom Vejvara* and *Father-In-Law Kondelík* and *His Son-In-Law Vejvara*. [...]

VI.

Mr. Ignát Herrmann undertakes that before November 18, 1926, he will not grant, except in cases of mutual agreement with [Biografia], the right to film any of his literary works to any other film company and [Biografia], on the other hand, undertakes that the film *Father Kondelík* and *Bridegroom Vejvara* will be finished by November 18, 1926, at the latest, so that Mr. Ignát Herrmann can, without prior agreement with Biografia, grant the right to film any of his literary works after this period.

However, if [Biografia] stated serious reasons for the impossibility of finishing the film *Father Kondelík* and *Bridegroom Vejvara* by November 18, 1926, Mr. Ignát Herrmann undertakes to extend the deadline by a period, the length of which will be agreed upon by both contracting parties. In such a case, Mr. Ignát Herrmann will not grant the right to film any of his literary works sooner to another film company.⁴⁰⁾

Apparently, Herrmann, as the writer of the bestselling local novel, possessed considerable bargaining power, which he appropriately exercised during negotiations with Biografia, seeking to acquire the rights. Not only did he notably raise the sum demanded for the rights, compared to the adaptation of *The Wedding of Nanyinka Kulichová* from the previous year (a twenty-fold increase for both books featuring the characters Kondelík and Vejvara), he also evidently leveraged his prominent position to dictate terms related to the future film's aesthetic elements and claim specific mechanisms of power that could be activated by him to control them. Therefore, Herrmann apparently granted permission for the adaptation, tied to a time-bound exclusivity for the Czech film industry, and delegated a significant amount of business authority over the screen idea and the film as a commodity in exchange for substantial approval rights, regarding the narrative and stylistic aspects.

However, the act of signing the agreement transferred the main production responsibility to the shoulders of Biografia. It also marked the official relocation of intellectual property ownership into the corporate structures, as Biografia became the exclusive holder of film copyright which played a crucial role in the period's industrial configuration and business logic of regional cinema. Consequently, this copyright-conditioned shift in the allocation of privileges and competencies was also reflected in the publicity surrounding the project. Indeed, reports in the film trade press presented Biografia as the owner of the film and the sole organization responsible for its production, even though historical testimony demonstrates that the tasks associated with the conception and execution of the pic-

40) "Contract with I. Herrmann."

ture were carried out by the company Elekta-Journal.⁴¹⁾ Put differently, the contract served as the first instance in defining the forms and hierarchy of stratification, as well as the limits of future artistic autonomy.

Balancing Individual Creativity, Contractual Frameworks, and Cinematic Conventions

The closed contract became the fundamental legislative framework for creative work, defining (a) the set of conditions of what was permitted and forbidden in shaping the screen idea, (b) the working position of hired screenwriters in relation to other members of the SIWG during various phases of development, and (c) the degree of their control over particular narrative and stylistic techniques. As the following sections will elaborate in more detail, the central screen idea was most notably shaped by screenwriters Václav Wasserman and Josef Neuberger.⁴²⁾ However, the services of this tandem were employed within the outlined legal framework and according to the principal corporate assignment: to adapt the novel for the screen and to adjust its key features to the requirements of cinematic storytelling and the specifics of the film medium. Additionally, their labor was subject to the priorities and instructions of other involved figures who participated in the screenwriting process. First and foremost, František Horký, the director of Elekta-Journal, who was also officially credited as a screenwriter, fulfilled an important function. In the initial phase, Horký ordered Wasserman to collaborate on the screenplay with director Miroslav J. Krňanský,⁴³⁾ who was creatively involved in the Herrmann adaptation from the previous year and who was to work with Karel Anton, the director of *Into the Genteel State of Life*, in the position of co-directors of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara*.⁴⁴⁾ Horký also, according to available information, acted as a company script editor, who supervised the conception of films carried out by Elekta-Journal and provided comments on the developing screenplays, which the hired screenwriters were to incorporate into the scripts.⁴⁵⁾

Furthermore, it is likely that Anton, who, in addition to his directorial position, was integrated into the corporate structures of Elekta-Journal,⁴⁶⁾ had a say in the form of the

41) Jan Trnka, "Dobry scénarista Josef Neuberger: Procesy psaní a vývoje scénáře v české kinematografii 1919–1965" (Unpublished PhD dissertation, Masaryk University, 2018), 56.

42) Although this section mainly focuses on the role of screenwriters, its objective is not to foreground their creativity at the expense of other SIWG members. This contrasts with papers utilizing the "restorative approach" in the historiography of screenwriting, as observed by Steven Maras. Instead, it avoids this fallacy by focusing on the complex interplay of interests and decisions among all parties, including the novelist and film companies, whose legal authority over the screen idea is emphasized. See Steven Maras, "Some attitudes and trajectories in screenwriting research," *Journal of Screenwriting* 2, no. 2 (2011), 276–277.

43) Trnka, "Dobry scénarista Josef Neuberger," 56.

44) Anon., "Režisér filmu 'Vdávky Nanyňky Kulichovy,'" *Kino* 1, no. 1 (1926), 5.

45) Trnka, "Dobry scénarista Josef Neuberger," 56.

46) That was probably due to Anton's close contacts with Oskar Kosek, an influential local cinema owner and one of the managers at the powerful local production company Elektafilm. Kosek's business operations extended to the filmmaker's previous projects, and he allegedly provided capital necessary for the founding of Elekta-Journal. Kolár, interview by Brož, Štábla, Frída, Bartošek, and Zvoniček; Michaela Storchová, "KAREL SMRŽ, filmový novinář," *Panoráma* 7, no. 1 (1980), 56.

screenplay. Nor can it be ruled out that the screenwriters had to defend the results of their work before Julius Schmitt, the leading figure of Biografia, who initiated the *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* project and who later regularly realized his own screenwriting ambitions.⁴⁷⁾ Apart from that, Herrmann contractually reserved the privilege of artistic authorization and the right of veto, through which he ensured that he also had a say with regard to the form of the screen idea and could force the screenwriters to make greater or lesser changes if the screenplay went in directions other than those desired by the novelist.⁴⁸⁾ The explanation of the interplay of work and creative relationships and/or priorities among individual members of the complex SIWG is further complicated by the unofficial nature of Neuberg's involvement in the screenwriting process. As Wasserman's apprentice, Neuberg worked on the script uncredited, undergoing creative training under his master and learning the craft of screenwriting from him.⁴⁹⁾ Historical evidence thus demonstrates that the degree of acknowledged screenwriting authorship was, despite documented individual creative involvement and participation in the development of the given screen idea, primarily a result of the hierarchy and distribution of power both on the official level between (a) contractual partners, (b) the corporate client and the service contractor, and (c) employers and employees, as well as in informal relationships among the collaborators.

Although the screenwriters held, from an employment perspective, the status of service providers under a work-for-hire arrangement in the SIWG,⁵⁰⁾ with their work subordinate to corporate interests or the instructions of individuals with a higher degree of allocation of decision-making privileges or artistic autonomy, the process of writing and the shape of the screen idea were molded by their indispensable and irreplaceable creative know-how within the context of the SIWG. The nature of their creativity was evident in a series of problem-solving innovations related to both storytelling and style as they adapted the logic of written text to the specifics of film media. The practices they employed stemmed from their familiarity with aesthetic conventions, their absorption of reliable screenwriting techniques, and their knowledge of traditions in which the adaptations of local popular novels were culturally rooted.

Considering the storytelling, the screenwriters essentially respected the design of Herrmann's novel and the order of the narratively most important events associated with the pattern of Vejvara's courtship of Kondelík's daughter. However, the basic structural principle they followed in the narrative dimension of the screen idea was driven by knowledge

47) Trnka, "Dobry scénarista Josef Neuberg," 118–123.

48) Wasserman even recounted that he and Krňanský visited Herrmann several times during his "office hours" while working on the script, and Herrmann consulted with them on their screenwriting ideas. "Ignát Herrmann jako filmový autor," sign. III. b) 1), inv. č. 236, k. 3, fond Wasserman Václav, NFA, Prague, Czech Republic.

49) Trnka, "Dobry scénarista Josef Neuberg," 56.

50) Despite Trnka's statement of a long-term employment contract between Wasserman and Elekta-Journal, Wasserman's in-house screenwriting role at the company lasted only eight weeks, involving just two film projects. Since this temporary, project-based engagement aligns with standard temporary hiring practices for freelance screenwriters, I consider it almost a typical work-for-hire arrangement on a corporate commission.

Ibid., 55–63.

of the technological limitations of local movie theatres, which was a characteristic symptom of Czech film culture and which Czech screenwriters had long considered for innovative work with rhythm, information distribution, causality, and spatiotemporal relationships. Since domestic cinemas were equipped with only one projector, and there were necessary technical breaks between individual film reels during screenings, screenwriters (as in other European film industries) from the late 1910s onwards, conventionally designed their scripts into narrative acts (also called “parts”) that corresponded to the length of the reels.⁵¹⁾

Following the convention of dividing a story into such story units can also be traced in the adaptation work of Wasserman and Neuberg, who transformed selected chapters from the novel into screenplay segments, equivalent to a film reel in length.⁵²⁾ Consequently, the screenwriters sustained a characteristic feature of Herrmann’s novel, which they further amplified through their craft-based work with narrative acts. This choice led to a highly episodic storytelling, which was typical of the local domestic production of that time.⁵³⁾ As a result, they did not shift the plot’s construction towards a causally coherent form following the example of international norms, but on the contrary, by loosening the relationships between the reels, they followed the local traditions of telling stories and the portrayal of fictional characters.

This approach to solving the adaptation problem under the outlined technological conditions led to concentrating the action and characters around a central situation or event — for example, one act is entirely dedicated to the independent segment of Kondelík and Vejvara’s tourist trip, which is broken down into a series of comic episodes resulting from the fact that these characters get lost. However, this situation is completely resolved within the space of the given reel, and the next part establishes a new episodic thread connected with a completely different type of event. The screenwriting creativity, therefore, consisted in constructing an internal narrative structure for each reel separately, the dynamics of which were derived from temporary plotlines, which then escalated and reached their own resolution within the expected timeframe of the film reel. Moreover, this writing method allowed the screenwriters to organically incorporate gags and other visual attractions into the narrative — elements that did not directly develop the central plot — and to strategically plan audience reactions at the climax of each episode, such as building suspense or stimulating spectators’ curiosity. Correspondingly, the screenwriters needed to be innovative, either elaborating on condensed situations from the novel or eliminating certain novel features such as environmental or atmospheric descriptions in order to translate Herrmann’s book into effective cinematic storytelling.⁵⁴⁾

Stylistically, Wasserman and Neuberg anticipated the functions of *mise-en-scène*, editing, and framing in service of the narrative. Beyond materializing comic elements rooted in local grotesque and cabaret traditions, the screenwriters frequently suggested using close-ups to emphasize key gestures or objects, highlighting important set-design ele-

51) Martin Kos, “Reel by reel: Jan Stanislav Kolár’s poetics in the context of transition to feature-length format in Czech silent cinema,” *Journal of Screenwriting* 10, no. 3 (2019), 280–281.

52) Jan Trnka, *Psát pro film: Dobrý scénář a scenárista 20.–50. let* (Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2025), 373–380.

53) Kokeš, “Česká kinematografie jako regionální poetika,” 37.

54) Trnka, “Dobrý scenárista Josef Neuberg,” 63.

ments, and employing crosscutting to direct audience attention and distribute information. On the other hand, their authorial contributions proved essential in adapting the source material to the demands of the film medium, as the creative solutions fundamental to the film's central idea are readily located within their script. Ultimately, their writing choices opened up space for other specific effects stemming from the performative aspects of the actors, the strengthening of gender or generational contrasts between characters, the development of their individual characteristics through the costumes used, and the enhancement of the features of the idyllic literature associated with the family environment, the tranquil setting of Prague and its picturesque surroundings.

The screenwriters, therefore, exercised a number of authorial decisions, which demonstrably anticipated particular stylistic techniques, visualized the narrative action and characters' behavior across individual scenes, and divided the plot into larger blocks according to the logic of film reels. As a result, they visibly shaped the narrative structure of the adaptation and utilized causality and spatiotemporal relations as cinematic means to contribute to its coherence. Nevertheless, their creativity was subject, within the context of copyright and their work-for-hire employment status, to the authority of the novelist, who, in the project SIWG's configuration held an authorial position partially parallel to that of Renaissance masters in painting. Renaissance masters oversaw the creative process undertaken by their workshops, adding final touches to ensure stylistic unity and maintain the design's tone, their signature serving primarily as a form of product authentication.⁵⁵⁾ Analogous to this model, Herrmann contractually secured his authority over the film in key creative questions, and during completion, personally adjusted the form of the intertitles, ensuring their literary quality met his artistic demands,⁵⁶⁾ before he finally decided to guarantee the adaptation and its value.

This type of creative organization and hierarchy was also evident in the actions of Biografia, which initiated the project and commissioned the filmmakers to produce the picture. Biografia practically denied the screenwriters access to claim authorial credit, concentrating it exclusively into the single hands of the novelist, who thus fulfilled the *author function* as introduced by Michel Foucault.⁵⁷⁾ The company systematically foregrounded Herrmann's name as an effective means in paratexts to declare and promote the product's creative coherence and artistic value, while addressing cinema-goers as well as cinema owners,⁵⁸⁾ and to distinguish *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* from other films on the market.

55) Anabel Thomas, *The Painter's Practice in Renaissance Tuscany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1–4; Peter Burke, "The Italian Artist and his Roles," in *History of Italian Art*, ed. Peter Burke, trans. Ellen Bianchini and Claire Dorey, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 3.

56) Mocná, "Kondelík a 'kondelíkovština,'" 50.

57) Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?," *Screen* 20, no. 1 (1979), 19–23.

58) *Český filmový svět* 4, no. 3 (1926), 14 [Advertisement for Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara]; *Kino* 1, no. 4 (1926), [6f–6g], [Advertisement for Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara]; *Zpravodaj Zemského svazu kinematografů v Čechách* 6, no. 3 (1926), 8 [Advertisement for films distributed by Biografia in 1926–1927 season].

Conclusion

The fact that the screenwriters were entirely overshadowed by Herrmann in the promotional discourse, despite their numerous innovations and creative decisions regarding the film's narration and style, eloquently highlights the everyday reality of creative work for Czech screenwriters. It also amplifies the general problems they faced when adapting popular local literature. The adaptation project's nature and dynamics were primarily driven by Biografia's business needs and the company clearly prioritized the novelist's name as a stronger marketing asset when promoting the product, linking it to their distribution catalog and corporate brand. Consequently, they diminished the screenwriters' credit in paratexts and completely reframed the communication of authorship. This created a notable tension and a series of frictions, as individual and collective creativity and authorship frequently clashed with business logic and corporate authority. Nevertheless, Biografia, as the principal employer in a work-for-hire model, had the contractual right to appropriate the products of creative or intellectual labor and distribute authority over them asymmetrically as they saw fit, by virtue of their copyright ownership. Therefore, this enabled the company to alienate the screenwriters from any authorship privileges after the script was finished, due to their status as mere craft service providers in the project's hierarchy of power. In contrast, Herrmann's stronger partnership position with the distributor, secured through a formal contract for the film rights to *Father Kondelík* and *Bridegroom Vejvara*, allowed him to enjoy the public image of the author.

The evidence documenting the development of *Father Kondelík* and *Bridegroom Vejvara* provides an excellent opportunity to understand how the increasing trend of adapting popular local novels or plays for the screen affected Czech screenwriters' daily lives, creative conditions and collaborations, personal and group styles, and professional status vis-à-vis the regional industrial structures. In the still decentralized, precarious, and project-based Czech production environment of the late 1920s, screenwriting labor was not connected to long-term in-house employment and individual negotiations with corporate commissioners were the norm. This, therefore, meant an almost constant flow of work opportunities for domestic screenwriters within the constraints of the regional cinema. As a result, this benefited Czech screenwriters by offering more stable working conditions, supporting craft and aesthetic standards, and enabling the regular training of new writers. Nevertheless, the central case study suggests that screenwriters working with this kind of literature had significantly low bargaining power regarding authorship. A wide range of their creative options was often limited by copyright/ownership issues and work-for-hire employment regimes, while the artistic privileges and final authorization were contractually granted to more powerful members of the SIWGs. These practices resulted in the downplaying of screenwriters' contributions, damage to their reputation within the film community, and their marginalization in public discourse. Consequently, despite their crucial craft knowledge and aesthetic qualifications, screenwriters became nearly invisible film workers, while corporate brands and other artistic figures were promoted.

This article argues that claiming authorship in Czech silent cinema was not simply a matter of originality or creativity, but was deeply intertwined with the distribution of responsibilities, allocation of privileges, and competition for prestige within established au-

thorial clusters. The analysis of the screenwriting process for *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* illuminates crucial conditions and practices connected to the production trend that was apparently common across regional European cinemas in the 1920s, as research on Finnish, Romanian, and Hungarian silent film cultures has demonstrated.⁵⁹⁾ The presented findings, therefore, offer a starting point for regional screenwriting studies, particularly in examining screenwriting creativity, labor models, aesthetic conventions, and collaborative and competitive dynamics with regard to film production that were typical for local environments.

In this respect, the case of *Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* suggests that comparative analyses of screenwriting practices in this period can greatly benefit from focusing on the issues of contracts, copyright arrangements, product ownership, and employment regimes that affected screenwriters adapting local popular literature and the forms of their work. Studying these legal and corporate frameworks, which significantly conditioned screenwriters' artistic choices and the working patterns of their employment, can help us to rethink the roots and nature of screenwriting individual decisions and techniques, the position and daily routines of screenwriters within local production cultures, the division and management of creative labor, and the public as well as industrial functions of authorship. Exploring these frameworks and aspects of creative work not only contributes to understanding the historical configurations of screenwriting and filmmaking creativity but also remains highly relevant. Conditions related to copyright, contractual relationships, and employment regimes play a crucial role in understanding the workings of contemporary production cultures, as demonstrated by recent discussions on authorship and authority in media industries of both global and local scope.⁶⁰⁾ Ultimately, by examining the challenges faced by Czech screenwriters, this paper calls for new approaches to historical research and innovative methodological frameworks in the study of regional creativity, opening up crucial avenues for future investigation into the historiography of silent screenwriting.

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60) Taylor Elizabeth Costello, "'A Sea of Red Ink and Broken Dreams': Copyright, Gatekeeping, and the Curtailing of Creativity and Creators' Rights in the Age of Streaming" (Unpublished MA thesis, Philadelphia, Temple University, 2025), 44–75; Petr Szczepanik et al., *Studie vývoje českého hraného kinematografického díla* (Praha: Státní fond kinematografie, 2015), 276–278; Petr Szczepanik, *Screen Industries in East-Central Europe* (London: BFI, 2021), 71.

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- Father Kondelík and Bridegroom Vejvara* (Otec Kondelík a ženich Vejvara; Karel Anton, 1926)
- Getting a Camel Through the Eye of a Needle* (Velbloud uchem jehly; Karel Lamač, 1926)
- In the Summer Place* (Na letním bytě; Vladimír Slavínský, 1926)
- Into the Genteel State of Life* (Do panského stavu; Karel Anton, 1925)
- Military Secrets of Prague* (Válečné tajnosti pražské; Václav Kubásek, 1926)
- Mrs. Katynka from the Egg Market* (Paní Katynka z vaječného trhu; Václav Kubásek, 1927)
- Řina* (Jan S. Kolár, 1926)
- St. Wenceslas* (Svatý Václav; Jan S. Kolár, 1930)
- The Story of One Day* (Příběh jednoho dne; Miroslav J. Krňanský, 1926)
- The Wedding of Nanyňka Kulichová* (Vdávky Nanyňky Kulichovy; Miroslav J. Krňanský, 1925)
- White Paradise* (Bílý ráj; Karel Lamač, 1924)

Biography

Martin Kos is an independent researcher with a PhD degree in Theatre and Cinema Studies from Masaryk University, Brno. His main research interests concern screenwriting in the Czech silent cinema along with studies of regional creativity, paratextuality, and film authorship. As a researcher, he participated in a research project examining the history of film culture in Zlín and contributed to a volume of essays focused on film studios and film festivals located in this city. He publishes his research outcomes in the Czech peer-reviewed film studies journal *Illuminace*, and his articles on the Czech screenwriting practice in the silent era were published in the special issues of *Journal of Screenwriting and Studies in Eastern European Cinema*.

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