

# Perspective Subversion: Female Characters in František Daniel's Two Czech Films

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**ABSTRACT:** In František (Frank) Daniel's films we find two situations that do not seem to belong to his work. These are scenes from his first and last films, in which the perspective is reversed and for a brief moment we see a fictional world through female characters. The matter is all the more surprising because Daniel did not emphasize the issue of feminism in his theoretical work. The aim of the study is to show how both scenes stand out from the rest of the films and to try to explain how they can be seen in the context of Daniel's theory of narration. Methodologically, the paper combines an analysis of film form, work with archival sources and analysis of Daniel's theoretical books.

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**KEYWORDS:**

František Daniel, screenwriting, female characters, narration, Czechoslovak cinema

František (Frank) Daniel (1926–1996) is today known primarily as an internationally acclaimed screenwriting teacher<sup>1</sup> about whose own films little is known. No wonder. Part of his screenwriting and directing career overlapped with the Czechoslovak New Wave period, in whose shadow Daniel's comedies seem uninteresting. Still, his work deserves attention because it managed to appeal to the audiences of the time. Of the ten feature films he co-wrote or directed between 1957 and 1967, none was seen by fewer than half a million viewers, and six were seen by more than a million.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, seven of his films had budgets below the average for that year.<sup>3</sup> So Daniel could be considered a commercially successful filmmaker by today's standards.

František Daniel's work is also interesting because he himself had the ambition to think about narration and filmmaking in theoretical terms. It is likely he made a conscious decision to work on mainstream comedies, and was reserved about modernist tendencies.<sup>4</sup> As a teacher, theorist, and filmmaker, Daniel centered his work around classical storytelling and did not ostentatiously display formal experimentation. Nevertheless, there are several moments in his films that deserve analytical attention. In particular, I will be interested in the representation of women in the first and last of Daniel's films.

The problem of female characters in Daniel's films leads us, unsurprisingly, to questions of feminism. Despite the fact that Daniel's films are considered schematic, they cannot be interpreted in a simple way,<sup>5</sup> because they mix motifs that reinforce a patriarchal worldview (plots built around romantic relationships) with feminist motifs (strong female characters with specific agency). I do not mean to suggest here that Daniel is deliberately relativizing any values. Rather, the issue of equality was not central to him and he did not have the ambition to address social issues with his

1 František Daniel emigrated from Czechoslovakia in 1969 with his wife and sons. In the USA he worked at several schools including Columbia University and the University of Southern California. He has taught several prominent filmmakers of whom David Lynch has repeatedly named him the best teacher he has ever met. Daniel has also conducted numerous screenwriting workshops in the US and European countries. He still has a great reputation among screenwriting teachers.

2 Number of viewers: *Zářijové noci* (V. Jasný, 1957), 1,5 mil; *Kam čert nemůže* (Z. Podskalský, 1959), 2,5 mil; *Hledá se táta!* (F. Daniel, 1961), 1,2 mil; *Spadla s měsíce* (Z. Podskalský, 1961), 1,7 mil; *Letos v září* (F. Daniel, 1962), 0,6 mil; *Prosím, nebudit!* (J. Mach, 1962), 0,6 mil; *Komedie s Klikou* (V. Krška, 1964), 1,3 mil; *Dva tygři* (P. Blumenfeld, 1966), 0,5 mil; *Posledná růže od Casanovy* (V. Krška, 1966), 1,1 mil; *Přísně tajné premiéry* (M. Frič, 1967), 0,7 mil. For more see HAVELKA, J. *Československé filmové hospodářství. 1956–1960*. Praha: Československý filmový ústav, 1974; HAVELKA, J. *Československé filmové hospodářství. 1961–1965*. Praha: Československý filmový ústav, 1975; HAVELKA, J. *Čs. filmové hospodářství. 1966–1970*. Praha: Československý filmový ústav, 1976. At that time, Czechoslovakia had a population of 13,7 million. See ČESKÝ STATISTICKÝ ÚŘAD. *Československé sčítání lidu 1961*. [online]. 2020 [cit. 9 March 2024]. Available at: [https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/135999141/pramen\\_dilo\\_1960\\_1.xls/ebbbd478-329c-44ad-9ed9-b489b2323bf9?version=1.1](https://www.czso.cz/documents/10180/135999141/pramen_dilo_1960_1.xls/ebbbd478-329c-44ad-9ed9-b489b2323bf9?version=1.1)

3 The only films with a higher than average budget for the year were: *Kam čert nemůže* (film budget 3,06 mil Kčs; annual average 2,77 mil Kčs), *Spadla s měsíce* (2,86; 2,55) and *Poslední růže od Casanovy* (3; 2,54). For more see HAVELKA, J. *Československé filmové hospodářství. 1956–1960*; HAVELKA, J. *Československé filmové hospodářství. 1961–1965*; HAVELKA, J. *Čs. filmové hospodářství. 1966–1970*.

4 DANIEL, F. – KRATOCHVÍL, M. V. *Cesta za filmovým dramatem*. Praha: Orbis, 1956, pp. 38–39, 75.

5 CUNLIFFE, Z. *Feminist Philosophy of Film*. In CARROLL, N. – DI SUMMA, L. T. – LOHT, S. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Philosophy of Film and Motion Pictures*. Springer, 2019, p. 661. Available at: [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19601-1\\_28](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-19601-1_28).

films. I would be bold enough to speculate that a conventional feminist critic might view Daniel's films as a chance to consider how patriarchal values might be subtly encoded in his work. However, that is not my intention here. Instead, I will focus on two moments that stand out so strikingly from his films that they almost seem inappropriate. These are scenes from the first and last film Daniel worked on in Czechoslovakia: *Není stále zamračeno* [*It Is Not Always Cloudy*] Vojtěch Jasný, Karel Kachyňa, 1949) and *Přísně tajné premiéry* [*Strictly Secret Premieres*] (Martin Frič, 1967). In these two scenes, female characters appear in unexpected context, which is indicative of Daniel's approach to narration. And when I talk about unexpectedness, I do not necessarily mean that the situations depicted are ahead of their time either in terms of feminism or film narration. By unexpected here, I mean the disruption of the narrative of the two films in question. In the terms of film theory, we could speak here of *paradigm scenarios*, that is, a kind of model situations that carry a characteristic emotion and evoke a response from the audience. In general, the source of these situations can be stories that people tell each other, but they can also be based on literary and audiovisual stories.<sup>6</sup> One can assume that a film made in the late 1940s will deal with different situations than a film made twenty years later. Moreover, by analysing the representation of these situations, we can come to understand the beliefs that were standard at the time the films were made.<sup>7</sup> The question then is whether Daniel's films work with any such model situations, and what they tell us about the representation of female characters.

In other words, my aim is not to offer a feminist reading of František Daniel's films. Rather, I am interested in how it is possible that female characters and possible feminist motifs appear in Daniel's two films without the filmmaker directly declaring his ambition to address feminist agenda. Daniel touches on them as if inadvertently, at first glance it might seem that he does so by mistake. Of course, he did not work in a vacuum. The topic of feminism must have surrounded him, whether in terms of public discussion<sup>8</sup> or directly in person.<sup>9</sup> However, I will leave these aspects aside in this article. I will attempt to argue the thesis that female characters, and possible feminist motifs, represented for Daniel rather a means of narration. This raises the question of whether one can talk about feminism at all in the context of Daniel's two films.

In the following pages I will first present both scenes in terms of an analysis of film form and their development in the script. I will show why they stand out from

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6 CARROLL, N. The Image of Women in Film: A Defense of a Paradigm. In *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 1990, Vol. 48, Issue 4, p. 356. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2307/431572>.

7 HAMMETT, J. The Ideological Impediment: Epistemology, Feminism, and Film Theory. In ALLEN, R. – SMITH, M. *Film Theory and Philosophy*. New York : Oxford University Press, 2003, p. 256. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198159216.003.0011>.

8 In this article I do not intend to deal with the perspective of gender theory and the issue of feminism in Czechoslovakia. That has been done better elsewhere. For more see HAVELKOVÁ, H. – OATES-INDRUCHOVÁ, L. (eds.). *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism. An expropriated voice*. New York – London: Routledge, 2014.

9 Daniel's son Martin described his father's political beliefs to me as social democratic (in an online call).

both films as if they did not belong there. Finally, I will conclude with a speculation on how these two scenes inverting the perspective of the female and male characters fit into František Daniel's theoretical thinking on narration. Therefore, the article could also contribute to a better understanding of Daniel's theoretical work, which is often simplified.

### **IT IS NOT ALWAYS CLOUDY**

*It Is Not Always Cloudy* (1949) was a school film made by three students of film school FAMU in Prague. The directors were Vojtěch Jasný and Karel Kachyňa, who later became famous Czech directors. The author of the screenplay was the aforementioned František Daniel, who was probably also present during the shooting.<sup>10</sup> The resulting film is a combination of a documentary about the settlement of the borderlands by farmers after World War II with a plot about dealing with the enemies of the newly established communist system. Contemporary sources indicate that the film was made as propaganda in support of the new social order.<sup>11</sup> In February 1948, Czechoslovakia experienced a communist coup, so this film was developed and produced in a revolutionary historical situation.

The film *It Is Not Always Cloudy* is 66 minutes long and follows the story of Václav Pavelka (a non-actor, a real farmer) who comes to the borderlands to build an agricultural cooperative. The focalization of events is carried out through three narrators. Pavelka's perspective alternates with that of a non-diegetic narrator. While Pavelka's first-person commentary focuses on the intricacies of the workplace, the non-diegetic narrator's voice addresses the characters in the third-person, explaining to the audience when and where they are and what the situation is like. It could be said that Pavelka's perspective brings the audience closer to the life of a worker in the borderlands, and the non-diegetic narrator's perspective creates the dramatic structure of the film.

In addition to these two perspectives, the viewer encounters a third perspective in the course of the film – the wife of the main character, who comments on the events from the first person. She arrives late to the borderlands and offers a completely different perspective on the situation of the farmers. Although she herself works on a farm, she also deals with the care of the household, unlike the male characters. However, her input is minimal compared to the narrator's perspective and Pavelka's perspective, as we can see in Table 1.

In the film we see a world built by men, from the perspective of men (see fig. 1.1. – 1.6.), most of the characters are men and women are represented especially by Mrs Pavelková, who appears only minimally. And when she does appear in the film, it is mostly to care for the children. Thus summarised, it would seem that the film is a typical example of a work that reproduces patriarchal patterns appropriate to the society of the time, thus reinforcing the unequal position of women and men in

<sup>10</sup> JASNÝ, V. – KACHYŇA, K. Není stále zamračeno. In *Lidové noviny*, 1950, Vol. 58, Issue 216, p. 5, 14 September 1950.

<sup>11</sup> LIEHM, A. J. Není stále zamračeno. In *Lidové noviny*, 1950, Vol. 58, Issue 216, p. 5, 14 September 1950.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33			
Pavelka's wife																																				
Pavelka																																				
Narrator																																				
	34	35	36	37	38	39	40	41	42	43	44	45	46	47	48	49	50	51	52	53	54	55	56	57	58	59	60	61	62	63	64	65	66			
Pavelka's wife																																				
Pavelka																																				
Narrator																																				

**Table 1.** The table shows the approximate perspective changes by minutes of the film. Three narrators and three perspectives.



*It Is Not Always Cloudy.* Fig. 11. – 1. 6. Male perspective. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.

society. At first glance, such a film would deserve critical condemnation from the position of a hypothetical feminist critic. But there is a twist coming.

The scene I want to deal with is in the 23rd minute. In this scene we see the frontier village through the eyes of Mrs Pavelková. Up to that point, we could see the village as having been gradually improved under Mr Pavelka's leadership. But the perspective of the woman – caring for the household – is different. At minute 23, Mrs Pavelková makes her way around the village to go to the office and to buy groceries. However, she discovers that everything is closed and nothing works properly (fig. 2.1 – 2.4.).

In the scene, we watch Mrs Pavelková walking around the village, grabbing the handles of locked doors. She discovers that there are no services in the village. Mrs Pavelková's comments add to the situation: "I was prepared for it to be hard at first, but it was even worse than I expected. I went shopping... It's closed. Half past nine and nobody was in the shop. A bit strange. I thought I'd at least do some paperwork at the village hall (...) Closed again? Did I make a mistake? (...) I haven't seen my husband



*It Is Not Always Cloudy*. Fig. 2.1. – 2.5.  
Perspective of Mrs Pavelková. Photo by  
The National Film Archive, Prague.

all day. He didn't come back until the evening, and he didn't speak because he was so tired. (...) He didn't say anything. He's always grumpy when things go wrong. What should I do? I want to go shopping – closed. The village hall is closed. You're at work all day. It's best if I go back to where I came from."

The female perspective opens up themes that have not been represented in film before. The male characters have only seen work, farming and progress in coping with the difficulties given mostly by the elements of nature. All the progress given by their efforts seems to have suddenly lost its meaning because they forgot to build a place for life outside work. This is brought to the viewer's attention by a female

character in the 23rd minute of the film. Nothing more of the sort is to be found in the rest of the film. Mrs Pavelková's other entries do not offer such a radical view of the situation. However, that one moment mediating the female perspective sparks a conflict within the family that motivates efforts to deal with the enemies of the new state-socialist system that made the services in the village dysfunctional.

How could it be that one single short scene stands out so much from the film? A possible explanation can be found in the development phase of the film. The directors Karel Kachyňa and Vojtěch Jasný got the initial idea for a film about the borderlands in the summer of 1948, when they visited the area to take photographs for the book *Building the Borderlands*.<sup>12</sup> This book, full of reportage photos, was published in 1950 and documents the post-war transformation of the borderland. However, František Daniel is missing among its authors. He did not get involved in the project until a year later, when he was approached by Vojtěch Jasný and Karel Kachyňa to write the script for the film. Filming began in July 1949 and the film was released in cinemas in September 1950. The script for the film has been preserved with a large number of handwritten notes and edits. This allows us to see what the original idea for the film was, as well as the gradual changes.

The scene we are primarily interested in begins with the 36th scene of the script out of a total of 87. The title of the scene is "Mrs Pavelková's First Troubles." In the original version, the scene consisted of three parts, of which the first two made it into the final film. In them, we follow Mrs Pavelková as she discovers that the services in the village are not working. In the third part of the scene, which probably was not even filmed, because it is crossed out, Mrs Pavelková is in a bakery that is open and the baker comforts her that he understands how hard her life situation is.

Based on the available sources, it is difficult to say with certainty that František Daniel was the one who invented the reversal of perspective in the scene we are interested in. In collective works such as film, it is generally problematic to speculate on individual contribution. Yet we have several clues that the unexpected prominence of the female character's voice is related to Daniel's input. From the sources it is clear that the female perspective appears only in the script and in the film, i.e. in the sources where Daniel worked alongside the directors Vojtěch Jasný and Karel Kachyňa. In the book *Building the Borderland* and in the newspaper article describing the development of the film, where František Daniel is not among the authors, there is nothing about the female perspective.

The second clue is the fact that Daniel was invited to the project as someone who was supposed to dramatize the settlement of the borderland. While Jasný and Kachyňa would have been satisfied with a simple record of the process of agricultural expansion, Daniel thought differently. This is shown by the handwritten note on the 36th scene of the script: 'to suggest the possibility of family conflict'. Again, we cannot say for certain that Daniel wrote this, but we know for certain that it fits his way of thinking about narrative. Daniel thought of screenwriting as identifying and

12 FORMAN, Z. – JASNÝ, V. – KACHYŇA, K. *Budujeme pohraničí*. Praha: Orbis, 1950.

highlighting conflicts that captured the audience's attention, which he later noted in his texts on screenwriting.<sup>13</sup> Thus, Mrs Pavelková was probably not meant to represent any social issues, but represented a reasoning for conflict in the narrative. Through her perspective, we have identified problems that Mr Pavelka overlooked and could have further addressed. After its release, the film was also associated with building civic services and a "home for families."<sup>14</sup> Thus, one could say that the short one-minute scene is quite crucial with regard to how the film will be received by critics and audiences.

### **STRICTLY SECRET PREMIERES**

The second film I want to focus on was made under professional conditions almost twenty years later. In the meantime, František Daniel had earned a reputation as a successful screenwriter, became dean of a film school FAMU, and held positions in management of the Czechoslovak State Film company. The film *Strictly Secret Premieres* (1967) was based on a book of short stories *Collected Crimes by Vladimír Hudec*.<sup>15</sup> Daniel, as a screenwriter, developed one of the stories into a screenplay, which was subsequently made into a feature film by director Martin Frič. Writer and dramaturg Zdeněk Dufek also contributed to the script.

The film is 85 minutes long and follows the story of Hudec, a writer of detective books. Coincidentally, one of his manuscripts finds its way to the boss of a gang of thieves, who starts to carry out real crimes based on Hudec's ideas. The book is a fairly faithful adaptation of the book, but differs at the very end of the film. And that is the one scene we will be most interested in. The differences concern the character of the writer Hudec's wife, how she is portrayed and what function she performs in the narrative. I intend to illustrate this mainly by analysing the way the character of Lída Hudcová is staged during the film and at the end. The reason for the unexpected difference in the ending of the film will again be sought in the production documents.

The character of Lída, the wife of the writer Vladimír Hudec, is a supporting character for almost the entire film, whose main function is to motivate Hudec to make money. This puts pressure on Hudec to cooperate with the thieves. In terms of staging, her character is very often pushed to the edge of the frame, while Hudec is closer to the centre (fig. 3.1. – 3.2.). In some cases, Lída is literally pushed away by Hudec (fig 4.1. – 4.2.).

The neglect of Lída can be further illustrated by how her figure is blocked by other figures or furniture (fig 5.1. – 5.2.).

Overall, one could say that she is in a subordinate position to Hudec, which is most evident in the scenes when Hudec is angry (fig. 6.1.).

<sup>13</sup> DANIEL, F. *Cesta za příběhy*. Praha : Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1964, pp. 84–93.

<sup>14</sup> Není stále zamračeno. In *Filmový přehled*, 1950, Vol. 1, Issue 33.

<sup>15</sup> HEJL, V. *Sebrané zločiny Vladimíra Hudec*. Nakladatelství České Budějovice, 1965.



*Strictly Secret Premieres*. Fig. 3.1. – 3.2. Proximity to the centre of the frame. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.



*Strictly Secret Premieres*. Fig. 4.1. – 4.2. Lída pushed by Hudec to the edge of the frame. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.



*Strictly Secret Premieres*. Fig. 5.1. – 5.2. Blocking the female character. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.

The unequal position of Vladimír Hudec and his wife Lída is also shown in the film by the direction of the characters' gazes. Throughout the film, Hudec is often looking into the distance, which could be interpreted as thoughtfulness, but also as arrogance. In contrast, his wife directs her gaze mainly at Hudec (fig. 7.1. – 7.2.) or sometimes at the money and gifts she receives (fig. 7.3. – 7.4.).

Everything changes in the last two minutes of the film. The character of Lída



*Strictly Secred Premieres.*  
Fig. 6.1. An angry Hudec and his wife in a subordinate position. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.



*Strictly Secred Premieres.* Fig. 7.1. – 7.4. The direction of Lída's gaze. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.

suddenly becomes the head of a gang and starts to run the crime operation. Until then, a minor character takes the lead not only in terms of the hierarchy of the gang, but also in terms of staging the characters. Suddenly, it is Lída on whom the audience's attention is focused through her position in the frame, it is Lída who comes to the forefront of the scene and blocks the other characters, including her husband (fig. 8.1.), and the gazes of the other characters are fixed on Lída (fig. 8.2. – 8.4.). Thus, the female character comes to the fore in such a way that the staging patterns typical of the main male character up to that point are adopted in staging her.



*Strictly Secred Premieres*. Fig. 8.1. – 8.4. Changing the staging pattern. Photo by The National Film Archive, Prague.

The film's contemporary annotations also draw attention to the unusual ending: "Eventually Hudec's wife will come into the picture as the gang's leading individual. (...)"

And a new twist: Mrs Lída... got a taste for robbery and decided that... she herself would be the head of the organization."<sup>16</sup>

The reader of the book must be even more surprised, as the ending is completely different. The character of Lída simply disappears a few pages before the end of the story. It is clear, therefore, that somewhere in the process of the film's development and production, a crucial decision must have been made that changes not only the film's conclusion but also its entire message.

The fact that we have preserved the original short story, the so-called literary version of the script,<sup>17</sup> the shooting script (so-called technical)<sup>18</sup> and the film allows us to know when the decision was made. The literary script, which is a faithful adaptation of the book, sets up the ending so that Hudec has a quarrel with his wife (scene 69 in Table 2), and Lída afterwards leaves him (70). Hudec subsequently takes over the leadership of a gang of thieves (72), and carries out the theft of alcohol (73–80) and plans further crimes (82–83).

16 BK. Přísně tajné premiéry. In *Filmový přehled*, 1967, Vol. 18, Issue 51–52.

17 DANIEL, F. – DUFEK, Z. *Přísně tajné premiéry*. 1966. S-745-LS. Scénáře. Národní filmový archiv, Praha.

18 DANIEL, F. – DUFEK, Z. *Přísně tajné premiéry*. 1967. S-745-TS. Scénáře. Národní filmový archiv, Praha.

LS	Same	Difference	Lída	TS	Same	Difference	Lída
69	the quarrel between Hudec and Lída			73	the quarrel between Hudec and Lída		
70	Lída is leaving		will not appear again until the end of the screenplay	74	Lída is leaving		
71	conversation of Hudec and Jech			75	conversation of Hudec and Jech		
72	Hudec takes over the leadership of the gang	theft of alcohol from Poland		76	Hudec takes over the leadership of the gang	stealing a woman's dress	
73–80		scenes in a village pub	Lída is mentioned in dialogue	77–78		arrival of the designer and models at the airport	
81		Jech at police station		79–81		a new hiding place for thieves	
82–83		Hudec looking for Jech; Hudec gets arrested		82–104		fashion show	(94) Lída steals the fur coat
				105–106		in the thieves' hideout,	Lída takes over the leadership
				107		bank robbery	

**Table 2.** Comparison of literary versions of the script (LS; Daniel, Dufek 1966) and shooting script (so called technical script – TS; Daniel, Dufek 1966). The numbers indicate the scene. In each column we see what is same, what is different and the part played by Lída.

The shooting script, which in turn roughly corresponds to the final film, initiates the ending in a similar way to the literary script, i. e. with the quarrel between Hudec and Lída (73), Lída's departure (74) and Hudec's takeover of the leadership (76). Unlike in the literary script, however, the thieves now attempt to steal clothes from the fashion show (82–104). In this scene, Lída returns to the screen (94) and later replaces Hudec as a leader of the gang (105–106) and carries out the bank robbery (107), which ends the film.

This comparison shows us how significant the shift has been. Not only did Lída stay in the story, but she became a central character. This was stressed by the fact that her character took over the staging patterns of the male characters. This decision was made sometime between the approval of the literary script and the writing of the shooting script, and again František Daniel was there.

13.12.1966	LS approved for production.
15–23.12.1966	Director Frič's meeting with writers Daniel and Dufek about rewriting the script.
02–06.1.1967	Meeting of Martin Frič, František Daniel, Zdeněk Dufek, Ladislav Terš (head of production) and Miroslav Kubišta about the end of the script.
09–13.1.1967	Daniel and Dufek are writing a new ending to the script.
15.02.1967	A meeting between Frič, Daniel and Dufek.
21.02.1967	Daniel and Dufek are editing the script.
22.02.1967	The first part of the new version of the script.
23.02.1967	The rest of the new version of the script.
01–03.3.1967	Script corrections.
15.03.1967	Start of shooting.
21.06.1967	Start of post-production.
19.07.1967	Screening for Frič, Daniel and Dufek + meeting of the three in the editing room.
01.08.1967	Screening for the author of the original short-story.
25.09.1967	Completed 1st version of the film.

**Table 3.** Overview of development and shooting according to daily reports stored in the Barrandov Studios archive (TS Feix – Brož, 1966–1967).

As the daily reports show,<sup>19</sup> between December 1966, when the literary script was approved for production, and the start of shooting in March 1967, the decision was made to rewrite the end of the script. This work was the responsibility of screenwriters František Daniel and Zdeněk Dufek, who consulted with director Martin Frič. Unfortunately, the archival documents do not reveal details of their communication, but it is clear that the decision to make the ending of the film different from the book followed the conceptual thinking of the main creative team. It is certain that František Daniel was present at these conceptual considerations as a screenwriter.

### IS THAT EVEN FEMINISM?

In the previous section I linked both scenes with František Daniel. I have even tried to document, based on archival sources that he was close to the moments of

**19** TS FEIX-BROŽ. Přísně tajné premiéry: denní zprávy. 1966–1967. Karton Přísně tajné premiéry, fond SB SCE. Archiv Barrandov Studio, Praha.

creative decisions when both scenes made it into the films. Yet I cannot avoid the impression that this contradicts the knowledge we have about Daniel's approach to dramaturgy. Based on my understanding of Daniel's theoretical work, I would venture to say that the issue of feminism was not one of his topics. If Daniel was interested in anything, it was classical storytelling or, more generally, how to tell a story well. This is also the subject of controversy between Daniel and his students at FAMU in the 1960s. The New Wave generation was interested in modernist tendencies, which was most evident in the rift between František Daniel and Věra Chytilová, whom he allegedly criticized for her script for her graduation film *Strop* [Ceiling, 1961]. The theme of her film is female emancipation and stereotypes. Chytilová's memoirs show that Daniel was upset that her film did not have a classical dramatic structure and prevented her from dealing with the theme more freely and, most importantly, originally.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, Daniel seems to have been involved in two films that are at least worthy of attention because of its handling of feminist motifs. In this section, I will attempt to explain this paradox by drawing on Daniel's theoretical work on film narration.

It is important to note that Daniel was writing and making films before the rise of feminist film theory in the 1970s, so they could not directly respond to each other. Daniel's work, as far as I know, has never been critiqued by feminist theorists, so we can only speculate how his films would have been received. Daniel's filmmaking and theories focused on mainstream films and their success with audiences. In the context of western feminist film theory, it was precisely such films that were perceived as vehicles for patriarchal values.<sup>21</sup> The two films I examine in this paper, *It Is Not Always Cloudy* and *Strictly Secret Premieres*, present the audience with a male protagonist who fulfills his own desires, while the female characters in most of the narratives have secondary and passive roles, which has been a common target of criticism in feminist theory.<sup>22</sup> So he was certainly not a filmmaker with a specific feminist agenda. Beyond this, Daniel was highly critical of avant-garde films,<sup>23</sup> which, however, according to feminist theorists, were able to construct stories that contradicted the classical (patriarchal) narrative.<sup>24</sup> So how could it be that in Daniel's film we suddenly invert perspective and observe a fictional world through a female character?

František Daniel worked as a screenwriter from the late 1940s to the late 1960s, when he found himself caught between two distinct tendencies: socialist realism and modernism. He was critical of both. What he objected to about socialist realism

**20** CHYTILOVÁ, V. – PILÁT, T. *Věra Chytilová zblízka*. Praha : Nakladatelství XYZ, 2010, pp. 112–113; JURÁČEK, P. *Deník III. 1959–1974*. Praha : Torst, 2018, pp. 539–540. Chytilová's feminist aesthetics is discussed at depth in HANÁKOVÁ, P. The feminist style in Czechoslovak cinema: the feminine imprint in the films of Věra Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová. In HAVELKOVÁ, H. – OATES-INDRUCHOVÁ, L. (eds.). *The Politics of Gender Culture under State Socialism. An Expropriated Voice*.

**21** BUCKLAND, W. *Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling*. Columbia University Press, 2020, p. 65. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7312/buck18143>.

**22** Ibid., pp. 66–67.

**23** DANIEL, F. – KRATOCHVÍL, M. V. *Cesta za filmovým dramatem*, pp. 82–83.

**24** BUCKLAND, W. *Narrative and Narration: Analyzing Cinematic Storytelling*, Columbia University Press, 2020, p. 65.

was the lack of conflict,<sup>25</sup> and what he objected to about modernism was the neglect of narration,<sup>26</sup> abstraction,<sup>27</sup> and he warned his students against blindly imitating modernism, because the artist should seek new paths.<sup>28</sup> His critique of European auteur film lasted the rest of his life.<sup>29</sup> Instead, he focused on classical narrative, which may have its patterns, but that does not mean it cannot be revealing.

Daniel's theory is often simplified as the "eight sequences" and introduced as a formula for successful storytelling. In a way, Daniel is a little bit to blame for this, as he never published his theory in English in a comprehensive way. However, Paul Gulino, Daniel's student, who builds on Daniel's approach to teaching of screenwriting, explains that it is not something obligatory, and that when an author understands the laws of narration, he is not bound to follow the eight sequences.<sup>30</sup> Now we will look at Daniel's Czech texts and I will try to reconstruct where Daniel saw room for transgressing patterns in narrative.

The basis of classical narratives according to Daniel were characters, conflicts, motifs, situations and tension.<sup>31</sup> A narrative is the elaboration of one basic situation, but it must not be schematic. The author needs to think about who his characters are and what conflicts they are resolving, so that he can begin to think about the motifs he is using to guide the audience through the narrative, allowing them to understand the context and increasing the tension.<sup>32</sup> The conflict and its resolution is key, because that is the main thing the audience is interested in,<sup>33</sup> it must never be resolved schematically because it would not surprise the audience and deny the point of the narration.<sup>34</sup> And this is exactly where we find justification in Daniel's theories for unexpected scenes from his films. In other words, Daniel expressed it by comparing the work of an artist to that of a scientist, who does experiments. He takes characters, exposes them to previously unknown conditions (unexpected situations) and observes what happens to them.<sup>35</sup> The fact that even popular culture offered possibility for experimentation was nothing revolutionary around mid-century,<sup>36</sup> so it is only natural that it took place in Czechoslovakia too.<sup>37</sup>

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25 DANIEL, F. – KRATOCHVÍL, M. V. *Cesta za filmovým dramatem*, p. 87.

26 *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 75.

28 DANIEL, F. *ABC scénáristiky*. Praha : Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1964, p. 146.

29 DANIEL, F. Základem dobrého filmu je scénář. In *Kinorevue*, 1994, Vol. 4, Issue 7, p. 18.

30 GULINO, P. *Screenwriting. The Sequence Approach*. Continuum, 2004.

31 DANIEL, F. – KRATOCHVÍL, M. V. *Cesta za filmovým dramatem*, p. 84.

32 DANIEL, F. *Cesta za příběhy*, pp. 84–93.

33 DANIEL, F. – KRATOCHVÍL, M. V. *Cesta za filmovým dramatem*, p. 87.

34 DANIEL, F. *ABC scénáristiky*, p. 130.

35 *Ibid.*

36 BORDWELL, D. *Perplexing Plots: Popular Storytelling and the Poetics of Murder*. New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2023. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.7312/bord20658>.

37 According to Radomír D. Kokeš, narrative experimentation has been used in popular Czech films to a great extent since the 1920s. Unpublished conference paper "The Role of the Multiple Plot Structure in the History of (Czech) Silent and Early Sound Popular Cinema?" at the Screenwriting Research Network Conference, 14 September 2024, Olomouc.

So does it make any sense to talk about Daniel's films in the context of feminism? In the case of *Strictly Secret Premieres*, I do not think it makes sense, if I am being academically honest. If we want to consider the film subversive, it would only be in the context of mainstream and established practices. The final change in the use of staging patterns and their transfer from male to female character does not bring anything feminist to the film. The female character just takes the position of the male characters.

The situation in the film *It Is Not Always Cloudy* is more interesting in the context of feminism. The one scene flipping the perspective in favour of the female character was probably the result of a dramaturgical decision, as the handwritten note in the script shows. At the same time, that one scene showed the world of the film through the perspective of a female caregiver who has different demands on a functioning community than the male characters.

In both cases, however, it is clear that the feminist agenda was not the main motivation. It was the needs of the narrative – in the form of working with conflict and tension between characters. So we are talking rather about working with the function of the female character. In the case of this film, however, this function is directly related to the different perspectives of the male and female characters on everyday life.

## CONCLUSION

The ambition of this article was to offer a partial insight into the audiovisual work of František Daniel, who is now known primarily as an internationally renowned teacher of screenwriting. Although he never explicitly thematized feminism in his texts and was considered a conservative storyteller, in the two films he worked on as a screenwriter we can find unexpected scenes with a prominent female character. For Daniel, it was probably just a dramaturgical decision regardless of the feminist agenda. Despite this, he managed to create a moment in *It Is Not Always Cloudy* that deserves attention if we deal with feminist motifs in art. In this study I have tried to attempt an argument that despite Daniel's conservative attitude towards narration he was still open to exploring new possibilities and experimentation, and what forms these experiments might have taken in practice.

Comparing the films František Daniel worked on and the theoretical texts he wrote shows us one more thing. Despite the way he is nowadays perceived as a teacher of screenwriting, he never aspired to write a manual or “cookbook” for screenwriters. By comparing his texts and his films, we get a more nuanced understanding of how he led students to think about writing scripts, and that it was not about imitating tried-and-true formulas.

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