

MARTIN ŠRAJER / 10. 6. 2025

# Desire Named Anada

‘The creation, production and post-production of this film whose title changed countless times before we came to the final title of *Desire Named Anada* was plagued by strange nervousness and abnormality from the very beginning.’<sup>[1]</sup>

Similar nervousness which according to Elmar Klos’s recollection characterised his last collaboration with Ján Kadár was also present in period press asking when the duo would film something new. The impatience of Czechoslovak journalists wondering what’s the hold-up grew with each passing month since the premiere of *The Shop on Main Street* (*Obchod na korze*, 1965) in 1965. A year later, the film won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. Another year later, the film’s leading lady Ida Kamińska was also nominated for an Academy Award. And Kadár and Klos still haven’t filmed anything. In the end, it took six years. That’s the gap between the Czechoslovak premiers of *The Shop on Main Street* and *Desire Named Anada* (*Touha zvaná Anada*, 1969).

The reason behind that wasn’t a lack of subjects. After their Oscar win, they received quite a few proposals. And they weren’t the only ones. In the second half of the 1960s, foreign producers started to register Czechoslovak films. The borders opened up a little and many co-productions with the West were produced. ‘At this moment, the position of our filmmakers is relatively better than anywhere else, in the East or West,’<sup>[2]</sup> Jan Kadár praised the situation in 1968. A foreign producer was also involved in the project that Kadár and Klos had been focusing on – an adaptation of Čapek’s *War with the Newts* (*Válka s mloky*). However, the planned epic got shelved during the script preparation phase as it couldn’t move forward due to the unclear situation with copyrights and contracts.

Kadár and Klos then decided to adapt another book by Ladislav Mňačko, the author of the partisan novel *Death is Called Engelchen* (*Smrt si říká Engelchen*) they adapted

into a feature film in 1963). But his novel *The Taste of Power* (Jak chutná moc) was too critical and political even for the liberal 1960s so the project was eventually cancelled. It wasn't until the summer of 1968 when the news that Kadár and Klos were working on another adaptation began to spread. The film version of a book titled *Something Is Drifting on the Water* (Valamit visz a víz) by Hungarian writer Lajos Zilahy was originally commissioned by New York-based company Videotronics, Inc. In such a case, the filmmakers wouldn't have proper control over their film so they agreed with their American partner that it will be co-production of Barrandov and New York.

The balladic novel from 1928 intrigued Kadár with its depiction of a person in crisis and their moral responsibility which he and Klos thematised in their previous films as well. While *The Shop in Main Street* revolves around unintentional killing and coming to terms with it, the hero of *Anada* is consumed by the very thought of murder and a search to justify it. According to Klos, however, the original story was so out of line with their dramaturgy and used such obsolete symbolism that he hesitated with its adaptation and began to work on it with open reluctance. Paradoxically, he ended up directing a substantial part of the film himself. [3]

The entire narrative has, unlike previous films by Kadár and Klos, timeless outlines with a loose connection to reality and is a retrospective reconstruction of what actually happened depicted from the perspective of various characters. Fisherman János lives on the banks of the Danube with his wife, teenage son and his father-in-law. One day, the river washes up the body of a beautiful young woman. No one knows where she came from. It seems she has no past. Just a name – Anada. Her presence disrupts the harmonious family. But the woman herself is not to blame, she just ethereally floats through space, looking mysterious, but the three men are unable to control their passions.

During the production, Kadár and Klos didn't share much detail. They had concerns the project could end up as the adaptations of Čapek and Mňačko and they also didn't know what shape the project would take. When they started communicating with the journalist, they had already signed the contract, cast the actors and selected locations. The shooting was to take place in Rusovce near Bratislava where the set of the fishing hut was built. Its interior was built in the Hostivař studios in

Prague. The leading female role was to be portrayed by American model Pola Pritchett. It would be her only major film role. In other roles, the directors cast Serbian actor Rade Markovič, known to Czech audiences from *Three Wishes* (Tři přání, 1958) and *The Angel of Blissful Death* (Anděl blažené smrti, 1965), Jozef Kroner and Jaroslav Marvan (whose character of father-in-law was originally supposed to be played by Jiří Voskovec).

Filming was supposed to start in July 1968 but due to complicated coordination of collaborators from various corners of the world, it was impossible. A month later, the occupation tanks arrived and the exterior sets suddenly found themselves in a military zone stretching along the border, so the filmmakers were unable to make the planned summer exterior shots necessary to set the mood of the film. The long planned and eagerly awaited filming had to be postponed.

The preparations resumed after six months but without Ján Kadár who left Czechoslovakia after the events of August 1968 and refused to come back. He actually couldn't, as in February 1969 in New York, he began filming his first solo feature film *The Angel Levine* starring Zero Mostel. When *Anada* resumed production in May 1969, only one director was present on the set – Elmar Klos. Kadár joined him later and worked in parallel on the final cut and post-production of *The Angel Levine*. After *Anada* was finished in September 1969, he never returned to Czechoslovakia again.

The multinational crew, composed mainly of people with whom Kadár and Klos had worked in the past, required instructions in several languages. Hungarian, Slovak, Serbian and English were spoken on the set. Initially, Slovak and English versions were filmed simultaneously, but eventually, only Slovak was used and the film was dubbed into other languages ex post. Similarly, a suitable artistic style was created on the fly. At first, the directors experimented with black-and-white film contoured with colour grading, but in the end, they chose Eastman colour material provided by the American co-producer.

The initial insecurity about the result persisted during the filming itself, as evidenced by Klos's words from a period news report: 'We originally had the feeling that we were making a film about the emotional and fantastic life of man. Now that we're making it,

we see that nature influences the film so much that it primarily shifts to a level of a paradise sonata about the tragedy of a man who has strayed from his beaten track of certainty and human contacts.’ [4]

Another part of the article is also worth quoting: ‘I have to admit that I talk about this film with some uncertainty, the whole story oscillates on the border between reality and desire and crosses this border very freely... So we have to clarify to ourselves what actually happened in the story and what the hero only wished and imagined.’ [5]

It wasn’t only the uncertain vision that aroused doubts, but also the growing gap between the two directors. In reports from the set, they openly declared that this was to be their last film together and they would go their separate ways after its finished. Kadár to America, Klos to school where he would lecture about film and to archive where he will research film. While after *The Shop on Main Street*, the journalists wondered why Kadár and Klos weren’t filming anything, when they had started filming, the journalists would be astonished by the information that they would no longer be making films together.

However, the inconveniences affecting the unfortunate production didn’t end even after its completion. Despite the conviction that the Americans would let the Czechoslovak directors keep the rights for the film’s final cut, the Western co-producers demanded significant cuts. Due to discussions about the final form of the film, the co-production was drawn out for another year. The balladic poem eventually had its Czechoslovak premiere in February 1971 and the reviews contained similar doubts that plagued the entire project.

According to Gustav Franci, Kadár and Klos ‘apparently don’t feel confident in abstract positions.’ He felt that in the story he described as ‘overfabulated,’ individual motifs turn against each other and each character seems to come from a different film. [6] Jiří Hrbas wrote that *Anada* didn’t reach the extraordinary qualities and intellectual depth of previous films by Kadár and Klos. [7] In his rather lenient review, Stanislav Zvoníček summarised his verdict by saying that ‘a routine work by experienced filmmakers aware of the mutual co-dependency of craft and art.’ [8]

In cultural magazine *Film a divadlo*, Ernest Štirc explicitly listed the main shortcomings: ‘The directorial intent is dominated by visual interpretations of

psychological states, the birth of passion in a sequence of basic plot events where the main part is played by the beauty of nature and the rough life of fishermen. But everything outside this frame seems confused and unconvincing, the direction is unable to find a unifying tone of film language to depict the internal struggle. With regards to the viewers' expectations, the film was unable to find a decisive point of view: where the real world of the fairy tale story ends and where the internal struggle with one's conscience begins. Everything merges into a single image lacking separation.' [9]

*Anala* received more favourable reviews from many foreign critics who praised new elements and perspectives in the work of Czechoslovak directors. Their balladic poem, more poetry than drama, was screened at many festivals – e.g. New York, Belgrade and San Francisco. After the film entered American distribution, it stayed in some New York cinemas for three months. According to Kadár, this happened despite the poor promotion campaign by MPO. [10] People simply shared the qualities of the film among themselves.

The overseas performance of the film which neither director particularly wanted to make due to an unfortunate combination of personal, professional and political circumstances eventually brought at least a partial satisfaction. The ocean now also separated Kadár and Klos whose friendship, however, endured even after the demanding production and they stayed in contact at least by correspondence until Kadár's death in 1979. We can only speculate whether they perhaps would have made another film together in not so restricted conditions. This time perhaps under less pressure to make another Oscar gem.

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**Desire Named Anada** (Touha zvaná Anada, Czechoslovakia, USA 1969), directors: Ján Kadár, Elmar Klos, script: Imre Gyöngyössi, Ján Kadár, Elmar Klos, cinematography: Vladimír Novotný, music: Zdeněk Liška, cast: Rade Markovič, Milena Dravič, Paula Pritchett, Iván Darvas, Jaroslav Marvan, Jozef Kroner, Gustáv Valach, Vlado Müller and others. Film Studio Barrandov and MOPPO Productions Inc. New York, 116 min.

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**Literature:**

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Senta Bystrovová-Wollnerová, Mezi nebem a zemí. *FTN* 2, 1968, no. 15 (24<sup>th</sup> July), p. 4.

Miloš Fiala, Hrst plná vody pánů Kadára a Klose. *Kino* 24, 1969, no. 18 (4<sup>th</sup> September), p. 2.

Gustav Franci, Rozpaky nad Touhou. *Lidová demokracie* 27, 1971, no. 41 (18<sup>th</sup> February), p. 6.

Jiří Hrbas, Co uvidíme v kinech. *Rudé právo* 51, 1971, no. 53 (4<sup>th</sup> March), p. 5.

Elmar Klos, Hledání pevného bodu v prostoru. Vzpomínky na Jána Kadára. *Film a doba* 35, 1989, no. 10, p. 548.

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Stanislav Zvoníček, Touha zvaná Anada. *Květy* 20, 1970, no. 14 (11<sup>th</sup> April), pp. 42–43.

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#### Notes:

[1] Elmar Klos, Hledání pevného bodu v prostoru. Vzpomínky na Jána Kadára. *Film a doba* 35, 1989, no. 10, p. 548.

[2] Senta Bystrovová-Wollnerová, Mezi nebem a zemí. *FTN* 2, 1968, no. 15 (24<sup>th</sup> July), p. 4.

[3] Elmar Klos, op. cit., p. 548.

[4] Miloš Fiala, Hrst plná vody pánů Kadára a Klose. *Kino* 24, 1969, n. 18 (4<sup>th</sup> September.), n. 2.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Gustav Franci, Rozpaky nad Touhou. *Lidová demokracie* 27, 1971, no. 41 (18<sup>th</sup> February), p. 6.

[7] Jiří Hrbas, Co uvidíme v kinech. *Rudé právo* 51, 1971, no. 53 (4<sup>th</sup> March), p. 5.

[8] Stanislav Zvoníček, Touha zvaná Anada. *Květy* 20, 1970, no. 14 (11<sup>th</sup> April), p. 42.

[9] Ernest Štric, Neskrotná síla vášní. *Film a divadlo* 15, 1971, no. 6 (17<sup>th</sup> March), p. 13.

[10] Elmar Klos, op. cit., pp. 548–556.