

Croatian Radiotelevision / Croatian Radio Drama Department

JANKO POLIĆ KAMOV

“Earthquake“



Producer: Katja Šimunić

Dramatisation: Ivan Vulić

English translation: Saša Čohar Mančić

Sound Designer: Lana Deban

Composer: Maro Market

Director: Dario Harjaček

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Duration: 09:11

Summary

Janko Polić Kamov (1886, Sušak / Rijeka -1910, Barcelona) is a Croatian poet, storyteller and playwright, born in a wealthy bourgeois family. However, since early childhood Kamov has shown almost nihilistic doubt of everything surrounding him, most notably religiosity and petty-bourgeois rules. He died at the age of twenty-four at Barcelona's Santa Cruz Hospital and was buried in an unmarked common grave.

His short story "The Earthquake", written in 1908, is characteristic of Kamov's novelistic writing, imbued with the dichotomy of the farcical and the dissociated, the writing where all the farcical elements are hybridized with a relentless, almost frosty analyticity. This explosive and brutally explicit and honest narrative is dramatically topical today in our daily obsession with the fear of the unknown and the different. The obsession, which sometimes materializes as a perverse recognition of disasters such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, wars or coronavirus, as a deserved punishment or - a solution.

Averse to aesthetic canons and prone to mocking social norms, Janko Polić Kamov was not recognized as a writer in his day, but in modern times, he has acquired the cult status of a modernist writer and precursor to Croatian avant-garde art. The conceptual artist and poet from Zagreb, Vlado Martek, implores us through his installations and performances to "Read Kamov", while we exclaim: Listen to Kamov!

Voices:

NARRATOR (Kamov)

Younger brother

Elder brother

Breathing. Music.

NARRATOR: The first time, it happened out of the blue, completely unexpected: it seemed at first that it was a car rolling down the street and that the dog was barking as it always did when hearing noises at night. Then I met my brother's gaze (we were both in bed and I hadn't left the house for three days in a row due to a cold) – a giggly, dreamy and lecherous gaze, and I immediately realized that his expression showed mystery, apparitions and lifting, then lowering, swimming, swinging and brain spraying.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Did you hear that?

NARRATOR: It was an earthquake.

VOICES: Earthquake! Earthquake! Earthquake! Earthquake! Earthquake!

Music.

SPEAKER: JANKO POLIĆ KAMOV „EARTHQUAKE“

Music.

NARRATOR: The dog's bark was short and muffled. Mother came to our room. And sister and elder brother. The maid stayed in the other room, breathing in large and labored short gasps. I was ill: for my mother it was a sort of an excuse to stay by my side. The others did not leave either: the sister said that she was afraid of being alone; the elder brother started mocking her; I of herself; the older brother drove the garment with her; I propagated the resignation. And indeed, it was only the fear that kept us together, because this way we could chat side by side, make a joke or two and reassure ourselves that there was no reason for fear.

YOUNGER BROTHER: Out of fear you fled from your room like your sister. We didn't. We stayed quietly in bed as if nothing had happened.

ELDER BROTHER: Because you couldn't even move out of fear. There is no reason to fear, because the first waves are usually the strongest.

NARRATOR: He knows what he is talking about, I thought, and that may have completely calmed me down.

ELDER BROTHER: For these houses of ours to get demolished, the earthquake should be much more shattering, and our modern houses are built that way... the elasticity of the brick excludes any disaster, even in the case of an unusually violent earthquake.

NARRATOR: But I kept noticing that the brother began to assert it seriously, especially to appease the sister, and as it seemed to me – himself, too.

Music.

NARRATOR: He was as afraid of our sister's fear as was I; our sister's fear frightened him, because a woman and a mother can foresee much more than a man and a brother ... Finally, our sister calmed down. The dog kept still and didn't make a sound.

Music.

NARRATOR: The daylight dispelled all prejudice, premonitions and concerns. But when the night would come, they would also return. I knew that earthquakes usually occur at night.

And the night magnifies everything, especially because we see nothing; powerless is our vision: darkness can bear within a villain, a snake, a scorpion - we see nothing; but darkness can also bear nothing within - we then see everything: a ghost, an apparition, a monstrosity - everything is then a "*tabula rasa*": the night, the soul and nothingness.

Music ends.

NARRATOR: It was in winter; I was waiting for spring. At night I awaited the day. Insomnia was troubling me. I got out of bed: a walk, chess, staring out into the street, all of this was melting my stiff soul and opening my stiffened mind. Living in this confinement, amidst the same walls, with one single fear, I got more and more stiff and rigid, and only the shivering was plaguing me. (*Whispering:*) Only the shivering was plaguing me.

Music.

NARRATOR: So I started pinching the maid. I climbed around the kitchen, stumbled on her legs, grabbed her arms. I had to find another event, a strong one that would reduce the shivering; and a second thought that would paralyze that night of the rustling and the waves of the walls; and another fear that will overpower and repress the one of a sudden death, the barking of the dog and of mysterious glances. That is why I took sudden interest in the maid and became preoccupied with her: I had to make sure my mother did not catch me red-handed, I had to find an opportunity, to seduce a woman - to seduce a woman...

Music.

NARRATOR: one afternoon I didn't miss the opportunity ... I fornicated with the woman who lives under the same roof as me ...

Breathing.

NARRATOR: So now the fear of the child began to squeeze out the fear of the shivering, and now I had to reassure myself that she was quite experienced and that I was probably not the only one who took the opportunity ... Doubt may, for example, be cast on the elder brother because he slept away from us, had his room and pinched the maid all too often, seemingly examining the type of her blouse.

Music. Breathing.

NARRATOR: And I started to fear the child; my whole life and my whole future had to mire and cease with it. And then mother, scandal, righteousness and knavery - all that started kicking in my brain and what suddenly occurred to me was - an earthquake.

Music.

NARRATOR: Only an earthquake alone could solve everything. Well yes! Behold, it occurs suddenly; one wall collapses on her head, the ceiling on mine, the clock on mom's head, and scandal and righteousness and knavery get buried ... After all, if truth be told: What can such a tiny and ordinary event mean - a child – compared to one shivering that wipes thousands out in a second? And all in all: Why should I bother with these trifles of our lives if we eventually all have to die anyway?

Music. Barking of a dog.

NARRATOR: The shivering started happening again. The maid quit and went home. I am not letting anybody bury me alive for a ten forint wage.

This should actually have got all the loads off my heart and all those lumps and knots in my brain, because her departure had released me of all my duties and eventualities. But it was also a sinister sign, like barking of a dog and eavesdropping.

Barking of a dog.

NARRATOR: One evening the dog was unusually restless. He started sniffing, then barking. I beat him and patted him; trying to prove to my family that I beat him only so that he would stop barking so that our neighbors would not make us get rid of him. Nothing seemed to work. We were all pale; and we blew our noses, pressed our mouths, bit our lips, and took turns saying that he often barked so, and that earthquakes have not occurred for three days already. But the anxiety was getting tighter, the teeth were getting tougher, the lips thinner. In no time did we forget all about the shivering. The dog has captured all our attention.

Barking of a dog. Music.

NARRATOR: His eyes were bloodshot; now he is going to attack me. I was numb with fear. But I didn't let him go. The fear of the dog completely paralyzed the fear of the shivering. The next day, complaints from the tenants came: that it was too much, that it was no longer bearable; that they want peace and quiet because apartments are not for free, etc.

Barking of a dog. Music.

NARRATOR: So we sold the dog. I calmed down a bit. Though, two days later, an earthquake struck again. I've had enough. It was as if the earthquake had no intention to stop. This shaking shall eventually destroy the foundations of our houses and weaker earthquakes will leave a mark ... Our organisms are completely devastated. And what if the grand finale suddenly occurs? There you go, I can't even peacefully close my eyes now, not for a moment. There used to be a dog here: he would bark often and for no reason, but, when he didn't bark, I could peacefully fall asleep ... I can't even. I can't even. I can't even.

Breathing. Barking of a dog. Music.

NARRATOR: I do not know what decision to make and how to solve the problem that arose out of my sheer recklessness and sheer stupidity and - coincidence. And when I state it, there are times when I would like to leave it to one random shaking to find a solution to this randomly generated problem and if I could – it seems to me – welcome the sinister barking of a dog as a chime, which announces Easter. ...

Breathing.

Music.

The end.