

MAGIC REALISM IN KEVIN BROCKMEIER'S *THINGS THAT FALL FROM THE SKY*

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to study Kevin Brockmeier's *Things that Fall from the Sky* (2002) from Magic Realist viewpoint. *Things that fall from the Sky* is a short story which is selected from a short story collection titled *Things that Fall from the Sky*. Magic Realism is a literary movement that tries to give real states to the world of mind. The movement originated in the fiction writings of Latin American writers describes the world of reality and challenges the traditional perceptions of the ordered world which underpins realist fictions pretensions to reproduce reality in literature. In Postmodernism, skepticism and doubt are the tools of writers. Postmodern authors do not put force on people to accept the truth, but readers are free to accept the vision of truth which they believe.

KEYWORDS: Kevin Brockmeier, Postmodernism, Magic Realism, Pastiche, Reality, Fantasy

INTRODUCTION

Kevin Brockmeier was born on December 6, 1972, in Hialeah, Florida. His father, Jack Brockmeier, was an insurance agent, and his mother, Sally Brockmeier, was a legal secretary. His father was transferred to Little Rock, and so the family, including his younger brother Jeff, moved to Arkansas in 1976. He is an award-winning novelist and short story writer who has been called one of "America's Best Practitioners of Fabulist Fiction." Brockmeier has received Arkansas' stop literary prizes and has been recognized nationally with numerous awards, including three O. Henry prizes, for his masterful use of figurative language in stories that combine reality and fantasy.

In 2002, *Things That Fall from the Sky*, a collection of short stories, was published, and it included many of these prize-winning stories. Critics called his work "magical" and praised him for his ability to combine "the simplicity of fairy tales with the physical and emotional details of adult lives."

Magic Realism was born in the 20th century and is a form of art that derived from an art style that originated half a millennium ago. Originally it became popular in Latin America and then spread to the United States by 1900s. The term was first used by the German critic, Franz Roh, in 1925, to define the works of Post-Expressionist painters. He called it "Magic" because it is appeared that if the work isn't direct reality, but creates an illusion and deep feeling which makes the viewer stare in awe.

Things that fall from the sky tells the story of a woman who works in a library. It explains all the things which happen to this woman. From the beginning of the story readers understands that there are three women who work in the library by the name of Katherine: Katherine A, Katherine B, and Katherine c. The one which the story focuses on is Katherine B. There is a game between them that the one who tells the most open lie can rest while the others have to go around and work. It seems that Katherine A is the winner since she is playing cards in the computer. Katherine hears some strange noise, but when she asks Katherine A about the noise, she doesn't answer her. Through going around the library

she see a man standing on a table, holding two books in his two hands, trying to balance his hands. She asks him why he is doing so, and he says he wants to prove that the gravity law is not true. Before she can intercept him, he has squared the books in the air and released them. The larger book lands on the table with a flat bang, the smaller book an instant later. Then the man talks about meteorites, which he believes are not just peasant superstitions as scientists believe. To prove what he said, he writes a letter containing some of the strange things which fall from the sky, to Katherine. Katherine plans to go out with his grandchildren on weekend. After having lunch, they decide to go shopping and again they see that man in the market. She also visits her mother which is in Briarwood Nursing Facility.

When in the library, her manager asks to see her because of the wrong thing which she has done. Exactly at this moment, Katherine hears the sound: the double bang of falling books, so she stands to leave. When he asks her where you are going, she says "I'll be right back". As she walks from room to room, Katherine can hear her footsteps echoing softly against the walls of shelving. She looks for the man. She finds him at a table, weighing a book in either hand. He shows her the books and tells her that he is going to do another test, just to make sure. Katherine reaches for the books and asks the man to allow her to do it. Although surprised, but the man allows her to do it. She takes the books from his hands, weighs them for a second in her own, and then drops them squarely onto the wooden table, where they land in sequence, one following the other, *bangbang*. Then Katherine asks the man to go out and have lunch, the man agrees. Then Katherine takes him by the arm and leads him down the aisle.

DISCUSSIONS

When confronted by this quotation in the beginning of the story:

"It is easier to believe that Yankee Professors would lie than that stones would fall from heaven, Thomas Jefferson, 1803", readers are also eager to know what is happening when the author explains what the Katherine, the protagonist of the story, has heard. Author tells that this is the third such noise which Katherine has heard in ten minutes. Readers are thinking whether they are stone or not which made sound in this ten minute.

In Magic Realist texts, Magic Realism does not present the supernatural as problematic, but presents it in a way that does not disconcert the reader, stressing rather the coherence of the two independent perspectives. In *Things that Fall from the Sky*, readers are confronted with supernatural elements, not just the sounds which Katherine has heard, but also the examples which the readers are faced with in the middle of the story. But all these things never seem problematic for the author and also the reader. The reader is never disconcerted, but also he is engaging in the story to find the reason.

Ziegler believes there are two ways for a Magical Realist story to be beginning: 1) the story begins with the magical events, then it continues with the characters behaving normally, and 2) the story begins ordinarily then gradually becomes extraordinary. Although Ziegler's second way is more popular, but with in *Things that Fall from the Sky*, from the beginning of the story the readers are faced with magical events. Not also the sounds are magical, but through walking in the library, she sees a man standing on the table, holding two books in his hand, trying to balance them. When she asks him why he is doing such a thing, he answers that he is testing gravity losing. He is intended to prove that gravity law is not trustable and he wants to prove it's opposite. So readers see an unordinary character. He also believes that there are a lot of unbelievable things which fall from the sky. Not believing him, the next day he brings Katherine, some book extracts to prove he is right. Then the characters began to continue normally.

As it is seen, *Things that Fall from the Sky*, is an attempt to insert on earth an imaginary world, by mixing reality with fantasy. Brockmeier makes readers' apparently concrete world, as something unreal and transforms the unreal and magical world to a real one. Actually, Brockmeier tries to make readers doubt about real things to be unreal, he probably also tries to show the real existence of certain phenomena. While the man takes the gravity law under question, he also forces the reader to accept all the strange things which he says.

Brockmeier didn't use convincing explanation for the things which he describes within the story, but he also explain it in a way which it never seems strange. He describes it in a way as if it is a normal part of ordinary life. This is what makes his story magic.

According to Christopher Butler, Magic Realist fictions create all sorts of confusion. It also shows simulating confusions between fact and fiction (67). Within the story the man who introduces himself as Woodrow, asks Katherine, "Did you know that until the nineteenth century, scientists believed that meteorites were just peasant superstition?" By expressing such a thing, Brockmeier wants to confuse the readers. And it is a technique which Magic Realist writers usually use. Some examples of magic events which Woodrow discusses in this story are as:

- In April of 1987, the Rev. John Cotton of Chester, England, witnessed a fall of "hundreds of fishes" during a late afternoon thunder storm.
- Portland, Oregon. 1974. Ms. Cora Block heard something on the roof of her house that, she said, "sounded like hail." When she went outside to investigate, she found that her front yard and roof were both covered with live frogs.
- Reported in the journal *L'Astronomie*, 1890, p.272: A stone of unknown origin, which geologists were unable to identify, fell to earth in 1872 near the town of Banjite, Servia,
- In February of 1996, John Young of Bloomington, Indiana, was struck on the foot by a six-inch metal rod, an inch in diameter, while working in his garden.
- In 1990, while boating on a lake with some friends, Claire Mooney of Springfield, Missouri, was caught in a downpour of onion bulbs.
- In Calabria, Italy, in May of 1890, a substance the color and consistency of fresh blood fell from the sky.

As Bowers believe, once the category of truth has been brought into question, and the category of the real is broken or over turned, the boundaries of other categories become vulnerable (64). In Brockmeier's' fiction, the boundaries of truth and real has broken down, and the realization of them became complicated. It is only because that the author is firm and conscious of what he is writing, and the readers mind has been engaged with the process of the fiction to be real, and actually forgets those magical elements which have been applied in the text. In other words, the boundaries of reality, truth and magical elements are so foggy that the reader's eyes are just open to those magical facts which the author presents to him. This is the exact time and place by which the authority of the writer and his special mastery on the techniques are known and presented to the reader and to the world in a way that is felt to be accepted.

According to Bowers, Magic Realism is one of the unique features which make the reader follow the examples of the narrator in accepting both realistic and magical perspectives at reality on the same level(3).

As in *Things that Fall from the Sky*, although it is the character which brings these unusual examples to Katherine, but totally it is the narrator's idea which wants to impose it to the readers. By the structure which he uses, he forces his readers to accept truth and magic at the same level. In *Things that Fall from the Sky*, the same as the previous story in the collection *These Hands*, readers are faced with situational irony. In situational irony the readers are confronted with something which they never expected. The story begins by a long description of hearing strange sounds, the man who wants to take every law under question, Katherine personal life and her relationship with her sons. The only thing which the story never talks about is the interest of the man to Katherine and vice versa. So at the end of the story when readers see that Katherine leaves her work place by this man they are completely shocked.

CONCLUSIONS

Magical Realism includes a mode of searching, exploring, breaking and simultaneously crossing the borders between the magic and real to create another category- the Magical Realism. The characteristics of Magical Realism made it an accepted narrative mode especially in Latin America; it is possible to interpret this narrative mode through various critical perspectives. The flexibility of magical realism leads this mode to the fact that this is not a genre belonging to just one particular era, and to particular geographical area: it is a misleading claim to suggest that magical realism belongs to a particular location.

This study on the major part covers the postmodern features of Magical Realism as a conclusion. Moreover, the research comes to the conclusion that, the analysis of Brockmeier's *Things that Fall from the Sky* based on the features and principles of Magic Realism as a specific model of writing, can help the reader to analyze short stories of this type. According to the model of Magic Realism it is possible to investigate other Magic Realist works.

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