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"I Have Heard Many Stranger Stories Than This, in the Villages Along the Hudson": Magic Realism in Upstate New York?

Magic Realism is a liminal mode of writing par excellence, as it combines realistic narrative with supernatural or surreal events. Since its adoption from art to literature, the term has been used to label this phenomenon in Central and South American as well as Caribbean literature. In recent decades scholarship has extended the meaning of the term to describe the same trend in postcolonial literature in general, also including literature by marginalized cultures in North America, for example African-American, Native American and Canadian literature.

My paper will question the assumption that magic realism can only be identified as a mode of writing that grounds in the perception of marginalization. Or, rather, I will argue that the postcolonial condition also applies to works by American authors - white, Anglo-Saxon and male - of a certain region - upstate New York - that up to now would not have been considered in this context. More specifically, I will show that the combination or juxtaposition of the real and the supernatural, that is typical of magic realism and unlike the fantastic does not evoke hesitation, can be found in short stories like Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle" (1819). Such texts might also be considered as examples of an endeavor of nation building that is grounded in regional folklore. That these early short stories might also be considered liminal in terms of genre distinctions, since they are wavering between sketch and tale, is only another of their peculiarities.

Writers like Irving in retrospect seem to emerge as the originators of a tradition that later spread all over the American continent. Indeed, the literary mode of magic realism is not only reflected in other contemporary cultural products, such as the paintings of the Hudson River School, but as a cultural tradition can also be traced until today and can, for example, be found in works such as T. C. Boyle's *World's End* (1987) and William Kennedy's *Quinn's Book* (1988). Ultimately, magic realism might emerge as a more meaningful category of analysis for the literature of the early republic (also in the context of Pan-American Studies) than the currently more common designations for the era's cultural output such as Romanticism or American Renaissance.