

Between Reason and Unreason:  
*Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* by  
Salman Rushdie

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## Introduction

The June 2017 cover of the French magazine *L'Obs* features the notorious writer Salman Rushdie, sharing his opinion on terrorism and how this is related to fundamentalism. That month several terrorist attacks occurred, both in Europe and in the Middle-East. The year 2017 is not markedly different from previous years. The 2015 attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* and Bataclan remain fresh in the memory of many Europeans. Thousands of people have died in the Middle-East too, due to suicide attacks and other types of extremist violence. Terrorism has spread over the world, from East to West.

The same year that terrorists attacked France, Rushdie published his novel *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*:<sup>1</sup> the work this thesis is based on. The book depicts an apocalyptic world where violence and extremism have entered the worldly realm. Similarities can be found when looking at the novel, the state of the society in 2015, and the current state of society. A novel that discusses fundamentalism and rational thought – which, I will argue, 2.8.28 does – is therefore worth studying. Specifically, I will address the question how magic realism and transculturality are used to portray tension between fundamentalism and rational thought in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*, written by Salman Rushdie. To answer this question, I will start with a summary of 2.8.28 due, to the recent publication of this work and the scarcity of published academic work on it so far.

The first chapter will introduce the concept of transculturality, as Arianne Dagnino and Wolfgang Welsch theorize it. This theory is not only applicable to the narrative: it will be argued that Rushdie himself can be seen as transcultural too. Transculturality has, among other things, to do with different cultures and hybridity. An example of this hybridity is visible in 2.8.28's connection to *Arabian Nights*, as established in the first chapter of the novel when it is stated that “[the time of strangenesses] lasted for two years, eight months and

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter referred to as 2.8.28 in text; in citation the abbreviated form of *Two Years* will be used.

twenty-eight nights, which is to say, one thousand nights and one night more” (*Two Years* 4). The allusions to *Arabian Nights* – one of the most influential works from the Orient - are numerous. Yet, the novel is set in New York. Borders between East and West are crossed, both literally and figuratively.

Next, the philosophies of Ibn Rushd and Ghazali will be looked into. I will argue that Ibn Rushd is portrayed as a man of reason, whereas Ghazali is connected to unreason. When looking at the etymology of the word reason on *Google*, it is shown that the word can be traced back to the Latin term *ratio*. The antonym is emotion or feeling. The relation between Ghazali and Ibn Rushd is therefore tense, as they are opposites. This chapter will discuss how both philosophies can be categorized, especially regarding fundamentalism and rational thought. For this discussion, a brief explanation of these philosophies is needed.

In the third chapter, the contemporary relevance of both Islamic philosophers and their relation to transculturality will be analysed. I will show how both philosophers are regarded nowadays. This overview will also briefly touch upon contemporary terrorism, with a focus on the tension between fundamentalism, religion, and rational thought.

In the second part of this thesis, the emphasis will be on magic realist elements in the novel 2.8.28. It will become clear that magic realism is closely connected to the intertextual references that are present in 2.8.28. However, some of these intertextual references can be connected to the theory of Orientalism, which complicates earlier statements on blurring borders between East and West that are made when looking at the concept of transculturality. The question arises how and whether magic realism can be used to explore the tension that exists between fundamentalism and rational thought.

In order to do so, the fourth chapter will deal with the relation between transculturality and magic realism. To give a definition of magic realism, the article “The Latin American Boom and the Invention of Magic Realism” by Wendy Faris is used. Magic realism is a

concept that is relevant to use because of the incorporated tension between fantasy and reality. It will become clear that magic and rational thought seem to be opposites, yet, in 2.8.28 magic elements and rational thought can co-exist. Reason and unreason are terms that intermingle in 2.8.28, just as magic breaches into reality.

To look into the magic elements, the fact that *Arabian Nights* is used as intertext must be taken into account. The eclectic origins of this text create the necessity of looking into the theory of Orientalism. Magic is often associated with the Orient, yet, it will be argued that this is a dubious connection, especially when studying 2.8.28. Besides this, the Orient is often associated with Eastern religions, such as Islam.<sup>2</sup> It will become clear that this categorization has consequences when looking at fundamentalism and rational thought.

The last chapter will discuss intertextual references in Rushdie's novel. Not only *Arabian Nights* is alluded to: *Candide* is mentioned, and a more general reference to graphic novels is present. It will become clear that the contributions of those texts to 2.8.28 matter, especially concerning magic realism.

All in all, Rushdie's novel 2.8.28 will be thoroughly discussed by the means of the concepts transculturality and magic realism. In the end, I will argue that magic realism and transculturality in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* are blurring borders between oppositions, while concurrently being at the core of the tension between fundamentalism and rational thought: a tension that exists in the novel as well as in the current society.

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<sup>2</sup> Why Islam is seen as Oriental religion will be explained in chapter five.

## Summary of *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*

Described as “satirical and bawdy, full of cunning and folly, rivalries and betrayals, kismet and karma, rapture and redemption” on the blurb,<sup>3</sup> the novel 2.8.28 written by Salman Rushdie, promises to be everything but a boring read.<sup>4</sup> Salman Rushdie, well-known for his controversial<sup>5</sup> novel *The Satanic Verses*, in which the Quran and Bollywood were brought together, shows in his newest novel a world influenced by magic and strangenesses. According to Ursula Le Guin’s review “A Modern *Arabian Nights*” in the newspaper *The Guardian*, the story contains “plot buds from plot, endlessly. There are at least 1,001 stories and substories, and nearly as many characters” (Le Guin).

The numerous details, characters, and storylines resemble the Chinese box that is mentioned in 2.8.28, where “none of the tales finished because the box inevitably found a new story inside each unfinished one” (197), Rushdie’s novel exists of many storylines that contain other stories and are all connected somehow. Although this means that the narrative is complicated, it does not mean that a short overview of important characters in the novel 2.8.28 is impossible. In order to introduce the characters that play an important part in the novel, a graphical representation of the characters is included in this chapter on the following page. Below figure 1,<sup>6</sup> a textual explanation of the featured characters can be found.

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<sup>3</sup> The edition of 2.8.28 that features this blurb is referred to in the ‘Cited Works’.

<sup>4</sup> Since the story is not only interesting, but also very complicated due to all the different characters, a summary is added in the appendix.

<sup>5</sup> A *fatwa* was issued after the publication of *The Satanic Verses*. The Iranian Ayatollah Ruholla Khomeini sentenced Salman Rushdie to death because the novel was deemed blasphemous. A bounty of two million English pounds was rewarded (Ghosh and Bhattacharyya xxxix).

<sup>6</sup> Most of the names are abbreviated in figure 1.

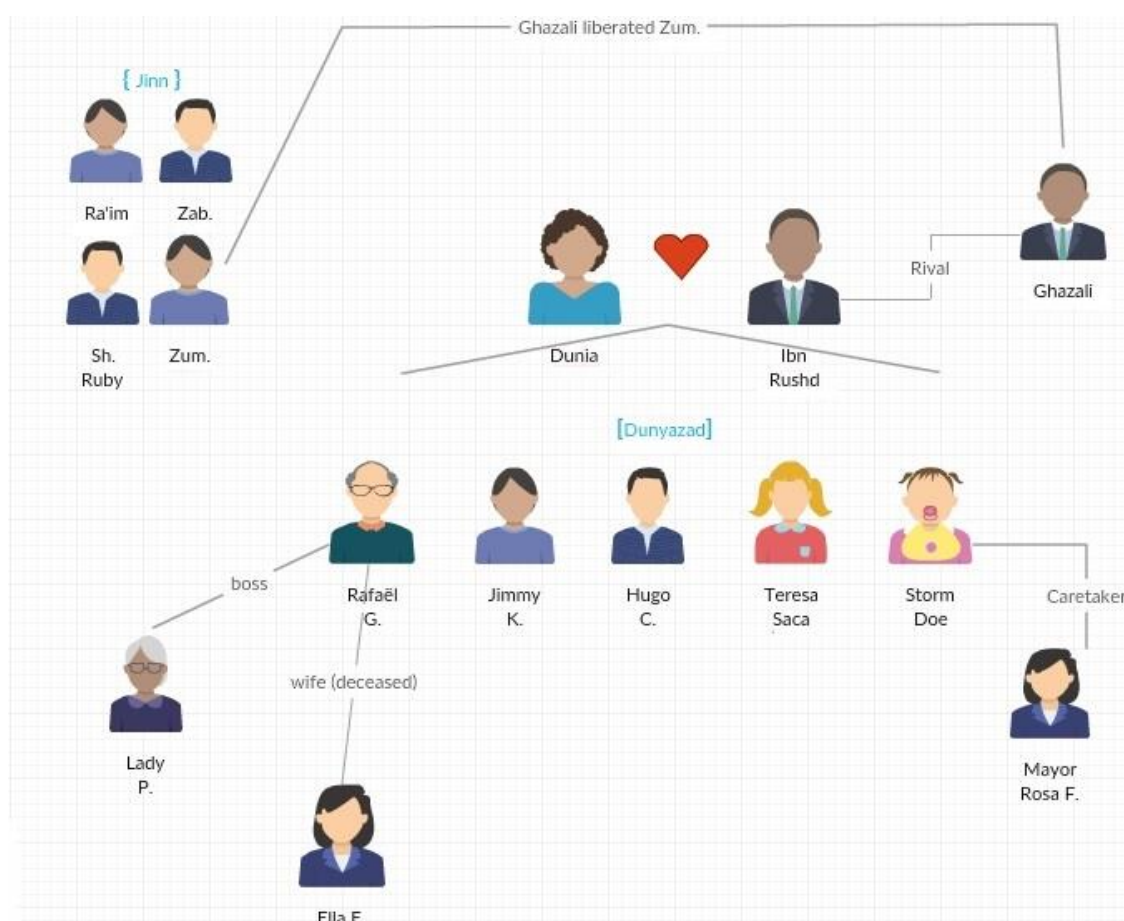


Figure 1

The beginning of the novel starts with a short introduction of jinn, which leads to the introduction of Dunia, also known as the lightning princess, skyfairy, matriarch, true mother, princess of Qâf,<sup>7</sup> and Oya.<sup>8</sup> Her descendants were named Dunyazad (or Duniazât), which is also the name of Scheherazade's sister in the Arabic *Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*. In Rushdie's story Dunia is a princess jinnia, a supernatural creature, whose name refers to a prophecy that says "because a world [*Dunia*] will flow from me and those who flow from me will spread across the world" (6). And a world does flow from her, as she "brought forth a multiplicity of children, at least seven on each occasion, it would appear, and on one occasion eleven, or possibly nineteen" (6). Those children are begotten by the famous philosopher Ibn Rushd, who is introduced as translator of Aristotle and a (hu)man of reason, at that moment in

<sup>7</sup> Qâf is the most desirable place of Fairyland (Peristan), the land of the jinn (158).

<sup>8</sup> Oya was a goddess who could wield the thunderbolt as weapon, believed to be the goddess of change, also known as Yansa in the 'New World' (America) and her image was merged with the Christian Black Madonna in Carribean worship of Saints (209).



disgrace of the Berber rulers. The background of Ibn Rushd will be explained more thoroughly in the second chapter. Dunia is in love with Ibn Rushd, which is rare since love is a human emotion and thus normally unknown to jinn. Yet, it seems that the unlikely is omnipresent in the novel, which means that a jinnia with deepening humanity is one of the least strange beings to appear.

Ibn Rushd, philosopher and lover of Dunia has died and is buried in the family tomb in Córdoba for over eight centuries. Dunia wakes him up – jinn are not immortal but can only die when they get killed by other jinn – and tells her deceased lover that another jinni is waking up his rival, Ghazali. Ibn Rushd is connected to Dunia; his rival Ghazali is connected to the Grand Ifrit Zumurrud the Great (abbreviated as Zum). According to *The Independent* they therefore represent good and evil, with Ibn Rushd being the one on the good side and Ghazali being the evil one (Sanai). However, good and evil are hard to define and in my opinion these are not the classifications that do justice to the position of both philosophers. I will therefore propose that both philosophers represent fundamentalism and rational thought – the reader can subsequently see for her- or himself whether a distinction between good and evil is relevant as well.

The offspring of Ibn Rushd and Dunia, carrying Dunia's name, thrived and became “a tribe that was no longer exactly a tribe; adopting every religion or no religion [...] a village without a location, but winding in and out of every location on the globe” (14). In addition to this, all the descendants of Dunia, which are called Dunyazad, are either migrants, or of mixed heritage. Mr. Geronimo (in image: Rafaël G.) is perhaps the most intriguing Dunyazad. After the introduction of Dunia and Ibn Rushd, the narrative continues with the story of Mr. Geronimo, who lives during a time where strangenesses haunt the earth. His full name is Rafaël Hieronymus Manezes: bearing the surname of his mother since his father was a not-so-celibate priest and he was a child born out of wedlock. Just as the ancestor Ibn Rushd refused

to give his name to his offspring, Father Jerry D’Niza’s surname was not passed on to his son. He moved from Bombay to New York later in life, where people started calling him Geronimo. He married Ella Elfenbein, who added Mr. to his name and thus Mr. Geronimo came into being. Working as a gardener he ends up at La Incoerenza,<sup>9</sup> a thousand-and-one acre-property, managed by a woman named Lady Philosopher.<sup>10</sup> Here the connection to the ancestor Ibn Rushd arises once more: not only was Ibn Rushd a keen amateur gardener, the incoherence hints at Ibn Rushd’s *The Incoherence of Incoherence*. Nevertheless, these small similarities pale in comparison to the revelation Dunia experiences when she visits Mr. Geronimo – who has been a widower for over many years at that point – and finds out that he is a reincarnation of Ibn Rushd in appearance. In return, Dunia changes her image to that of Ella and introduces herself to her descendant. Mr. Geronimo is at that time influenced by the strangenesses and is levitated above the earth. After he makes love with Dunia he returns to the earth, but “[s]eoperations of all sorts were being reported in those incomprehensible nights” (161). This indicates the beginning of the War of the Worlds, which is also a war between reason and fundamentalism as will become clear throughout this thesis.

Other Dunyazad are Jimmy Kapoor, Hugo Casterbridge, and Teresa Saca. Since all descendants of Dunia are partly jinn, they can resist the evil attacks of the dark jinn and they become warriors to let reason prevail. They will be shortly discussed.

Jimmy Kapoor created a superhero called Natraj Hero in imitation of DC and Marvel superheroes. His storyline contains several references to various graphic novels, as mentioned in the last chapter.

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<sup>9</sup> *Incoerenza* is translated into English as incoherence.

<sup>10</sup> Lady Philosopher’s name is Alexandra Bliss Fariña and she plays an important part in the decisive battle between good and evil. However, her character is not given much background and her appearances in the novel are few.

Storm Doe is a baby found in City Hall. People around her get sores when they tell a lie, thus uncovering corruption around her. Her caretaker is Mayor Rosa Fast and together they sweep City Hall clean of crooks.

Hugo Casterbridge, is a cellist and composer with a dubious history that includes a rumour of him selling his wife. He seems not to be blessed or cursed with magical characteristics. He claims that the world is tormented by a fictional divinity and he turns out to be right, only to be eaten by Zumurrud the Great after the discovery that his theory is proved to be correct.

Teresa Saca turns out to be the most warrior-like person of the Dunyazad. After an affair with a married man she gets angry and murders him by shooting lightning from her fingertips. She eventually becomes a mass-murderer who kills men possessed by evil jinn.

This group of people sets out to fight the War of the Worlds. All turn out to be somehow transcultural. However, not only geographical borders are crossed. They are also hybrid beings, both human and supernatural. They live in a world that is recognizable for the reader, but the world is disturbed by magic influences. The characters of this novel are eminently the place where reason and unreason collide. They go to war to save rational thought from fundamentalism, yet, they are hybrid beings created by a rationalist philosopher and a supernatural – one could even say divine - fantasy princess.

## Part 1- Transculturality

### *Chapter 1: How does Rushdie create transculturality in his novel 2.8.28 in intertextual dialogue with Arabian Nights?*

In the introduction of this thesis the concept of transculturality was mentioned: a term that could be used when boundaries between cultures become hybrid and diasporic flows occur. The use of characters that are not of an American origin, and the allusion to important literary works from all over the world can therefore be an indication of transculturality in Rushdie's novel 2.8.28. In order to confirm this statement, the German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch's definition is mentioned, since he was one of the first to introduce the concept of transculturality – as we know it now – in his essay “Transculturality: The Puzzling Form of Cultures Today”. Another important name is Arianna Dagnino, who focusses on transcultural writers, claiming that Rushdie can be seen as one. Both their claims will be applied to the work 2.8.28, accompanied with an elaboration.

#### Transculturality and Rushdie

A compact definition of transculturality is offered by Welsch, as he states that it is “a consequence of the inner differentiation and complexity of modern cultures. These encompass [...] a number of ways of life and cultures, which also interpenetrate or emerge from one another” (4). This idea of a complex modern culture can be seen in the heterogeneous composition of today's population. In a world where multi-ethnic groups live together, uniformity is an illusion. There are different ways to live one's life, not only regarding the multi-ethnic aspect, but also regarding differences in social groups, gender, and sexuality. Hence, Welsch claims that nothing is absolutely foreign anymore, since lifestyles are intermingled and cultures have merged. This is also present in the work of transcultural writers: they are cultural hybrids by alluding to various countries and cultures. This is also the case with Rushdie, according to Welsch (5).

Looking at Rushdie as a transcultural writer demands more information on his background. The *Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* describes Rushdie as follows:

Born into a liberal, middle-class Muslim family on 19 June 1947 in Bombay, India, Ahmed Salman Rushdie quickly gained experience with what would become his trademark themes of hybridity, dislocation, and the fantastic. Attesting to his various residences in India, Pakistan, England, and the United States, Rushdie's novels routinely feature multiple levels of reality, identity, nationality, history, and time (Kastan).

The idea of Rushdie being transcultural can be proved by his different affiliations and residences. The multitude of places he has lived, have inspired his stories, as is shown in 2.8.28: Mr. Geronimo is born in India, Hugo Casterbridge is British, and the setting is New York. Therefore Rushdie fits into Welsh's idea of a transcultural writer.

Arianne Dagnino's definition of a transcultural writer in her article "Transcultural Writers and Transcultural Literature in the Age of Global Modernity" also focusses on the crossing of geographical borders, as she states that "[w]hile moving physically across the globe and across different cultures, they find themselves less and less trapped in the traditional migrant/exile syndrome and become more apt instead to embrace the opportunities and the freedom that diversity and mobility bestow upon them" (Dagnino). The traditional migrant/exile syndrome means that literature written by exiled authors is expected to offer an objective view on both the country of origin and the country they migrate to, as the writers do not belong in either country (Mardorossian 16). However, Rushdie argues in *Imaginary Homelands* that he thinks of himself as a literary migrant: not taking an objective view or limit himself to just two countries, but instead picking his own literary parents and traditions, creating a "polyglot family tree" (21).

The importance of Rushdie's statement can be problematized through Roland Barthes' theory that "the birth of the reader must be ransomed by the death of the Author" (Barthes 170), leaving the reader in charge of interpreting a text. This theory can be contested, though. Jérôme Meizoz explains that familiarity with the life of an author can add significance to a text, in addition to close reading. This phenomenon is known as posture: a place where the author and the literary text meet.<sup>11</sup> On the one hand, there is the image created by the author's media presence, or autobiographies by the author; on the other hand there is the text itself (Meizoz 85).

Looking at Rushdie, it can be said that his public presence is closely connected to his books. The controversy that started after publishing *The Satanic Verses* caused a fatwa on Rushdie's head and censorship on his books in the Islamic world. This led to Rushdie becoming a warrior for free speech. For two years, he was president of *PEN America*: a foundation that defends free expression, supports persecuted writers, and promotes literary culture. He also reacted publicly to the attack on Charlie Hebdo with the words "the moment you limit free speech it is not free speech [...] the fact that you dislike them [the artists of Charlie Hebdo] does not in any way excuse their murder" ("Salman Rushdie in Vermont" 56.00-57.00). In 2.8.28 censorship plays a role too, since fanatics banned his books and burned them (5). Furthermore, an interview is published in the weekly magazine *L'Obs* where Rushdie states that a deviation within a system has the potential to devour it, which, in his opinion, is what is happening with fundamentalism in Islam (Daniel 35). As this thesis will argue, the story of 2.8.28 goes into this concept of fundamentalism, meaning that a connection can be seen between reality and the literary text. When applying the above mentioned idea

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<sup>11</sup> A critical note is in place here, because Meizoz claims that his concept of posture takes both the writer's statements into account and the text, however, the latter is scarcely mentioned. Therefore, this thesis will look at Rushdie's self-presentation in *Imaginary Homelands*, but not without looking for textual evidence too. The same goes for the public appearances and occupations that shape Rushdie's posture.

that Rushdie's public appearance is of influence when discussing a text, the earlier mentioned categorization of Rushdie seeing himself as a literary migrant deserves to be taken seriously.

The idea of migrant literature is according to Carine Mardorossian's article "From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature" that it emphasises "movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages. The world inhabited by the characters is no longer conceptualized as 'here' and 'there'" (15). Seeing as these characteristics are similar to those of transculturality, it is not surprising that migrant writing is addressed from a transcultural perspective according to Dagnino (3). In the following part, it will be shown that Rushdie's novel *2.8.28* is a clear example of the features mentioned above. Consequently, this means that his statement of being a literary migrant holds stake.

#### Transculturality in *2.8.28*

Rootlessness is present throughout the whole novel, not only because the offspring of Dunia and Ibn Rushd became "a tribe that was no longer exactly a tribe; adopting every religion or no religion [...] a village without a location, but winding in and out of every location on the globe" (14), but also literally when looking at Mr. Geronimo<sup>12</sup> whose life story "was no longer uncommon in our ancestors' peripatetic world, [...] people] splintered away from the authentic narratives of their life stories and spent the rest of their days trying to discover, or forge, new, synthetic narratives of their own" (26). This refers to the migration background of Mr. Geronimo, which not only incorporates the transcultural and migratory faculty of rootlessness, but also the mixing of culture, race, and language. Mr. Geronimo was born in Bombay, he moved to New York later in his life, and he is a Duniyazad. This all adds to his rootless existence. When his father Jerry narrates the story of Ibn Rushd and Dunia, Geronimo ponders that "'we are a bit of everything, right? Jewslim Christians. Patchwork types'" (34). Yet, father Jerry responds to Geronimo's utterance that "'[b]eing a little bit of everything was

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, Mr. Geronimo is also literally rootless, since he is levitating above the earth throughout most of the novel.

the Bombay way [...] but it is out of fashion. The narrow mind replaces the wide skirt. Majority rules and minority, look out. So we become outsiders in our own place” (34). This statement is followed in the novel by the death of Mr. Geronimo’s father (a Christian) and uncle (a queer man) during riots between Muslims and Hindus. The integration of several cultures in one place sounds ideal, but in 2.8.28 it is shown that not every place on earth grants the freedom of being the ‘other’. What is more, migration does not guarantee that the migrant will feel at home in his new living area. This becomes clear when looking at the case of Mr. Geronimo. When Dunia listens to his heart’s desires she finds out that “he wished he had never become detached from the place he was born [...] he wished he could have roots spreading under every inch of his lost soil, his beloved lost home [...] living a life *in context* and not the migrant’s hollow journey that had been his fate” (172). The cultural shift, from India to America, is described as a hollow journey. The cultures are mixed, yet, the migrant does not take root in his new soil. A lot of the characters in the novel 2.8.28 are transnational figures. These characters are often mothered by Dunia, who added a bit of magic to the roots of her descendants, who “spread out west and south across the Americas, and north and west from that great diamond at the foot of Asia, into all the countries of the world” (14). The Duniyazads are migrants and travellers. They do not only cross cultural borders, but also the border between fantasy and reason.

Another example of transculturality can be found on page four of 2.8.28, where the long title of the novel is explained as follows: “[the time of strangenesses] lasted for two years, eight months and twenty-eight nights, which is to say, one thousand nights and one night more” (4). The title can thus be seen as a direct reference to the work *Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*. This is recognized by Marcel Theroux in his review “Salman Rushdie’s *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*”, but he is sceptical about the real connection as he states that “this kind of overt commentary is a long way from the –



authorlessness and economy of fairy tales, which never lecture and whose bareness — envious stepmother, noble prince, dark forest — extends a more subtle invitation to the reader” (Theroux). This review has a critical note to it, arguing that Rushdie does not connect to the genre fairy tale as its predecessor *Arabian Nights* does. Other reviewers like Ursula Le Guin and Leyla Sanai connect the allusion to *One Thousand and One Nights* more to the numerous storylines that are present in Rushdie’s novel (Le Guin, Sanai). Although the reviewers have different takes on the influence of *One Thousand and One Nights*, it cannot be denied that there is a connection. Theroux does not find this connection in the similarity of genre — also, one can question what genre both works belong to — but various intertextual references<sup>13</sup> are undeniable present in 2.8.28. Philosophical works from the early medieval period written by Ibn Rushd and Ghazali are mentioned, as well as Voltaire, Spinoza, and Averroës (the Latin name of Ibn Rushd). Even Marvel, the producer of multiple graphic novels, is alluded to.

The reference to *Arabian Nights* matters when looking at transculturality. This is clarified in Robert Irwin’s book *The Arabian Nights: A Companion*, when he states that “the *Arabian Nights* has been so widely and frequently translated into Western languages that, despite the Arab antecedents of the tales, it is a little tempting to consider the *Nights* as primarily a work of European literature” (9). The origins of *Arabian Nights* are mixed: on the one hand the origins can be traced back to Arabian stories, but the story collection became widespread in Europe as well, where many translations were made — some faulty and only vaguely based on the original. Since then, many have tried to capture the essence of the original, without precise knowledge of what the original exactly contains. One of the most recent translations is by Malcom and Ursula Lyons, both specialized in Arabian literature, who have based their translation *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1,001 Nights* on several earlier

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<sup>13</sup> These references will come up throughout the thesis in various areas.

editions and translations. Their title is a combination of the two most commonly used titles that refer to the eclectic collection of stories. They also argue that “*The Arabian Nights* has drawn on many cultures and sources – Indian, Persian, Greek” (x). “The Garden of Reason”, an article by Adam Perchard that deals with Rushdie’s latest novel, adds another border-crossing element, which is that *One Thousand and One Nights* can be seen as “a textual cosmopolis that had been *borne across* national, religious, and cultural boundaries for centuries, before it fell into [Antoine Galland’s] hands” (308). The various cultural influences on the work can therefore be seen as an example of transculturality in *Arabian Nights*.

That Rushdie’s novel 2.8.28 openly refers with its title to *Arabian Nights*, is thus significant: that Rushdie’s work shows a similar variation of cultural influences perhaps even more so. 2.8.28 does mention titles such as the Persian *Hazar Afsaneh*, or the *One Thousand Stories* and the Arabian version *1,001 Nights (Alf Layla wa-Layla)* that point at the mixed origin. In the second part of this thesis will be elaborated on the idea that texts with a non-European background often represent magic, therefore the allusion to *Arabian Nights* is complicated. More intertextuality is hinted at, as Perchard describes 2.8.28 as “[b]ordering on the *Arabian Nights*, Voltaire’s *Candide*, and medieval Islamic disputes over faith and philosophy, the realm of fantasy and the sphere of reason” (“The Garden of Reason” 315). Rushdie’s novel contains intertextual links with Islamic theology, an influential eighteenth century European work, and *Arabian Nights* – a work that originates from The Orient<sup>14</sup> and is influential when looking into magic realism. This connects to Welsch’s earlier mentioned definition of a transcultural writer that uses works from various cultures.

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<sup>14</sup> The Orient is not a determined area. According to the book *The Myth of Continents* by Lewis and Wigen, “from the Middle Ages through the Enlightenment, Orientalists were typically philologists who worked with Arabic, Syriac, Coptic, and Hebrew sources [...] But as the Orient became synonymous with Islam, its referent began to expand out of the eastern Mediterranean” (54). For this thesis, especially the merge of Islam with Orientalism is important to keep in mind.

In addition to the cultural mixture that is *Arabian Nights*, often referred to in 2.8.28, another text can be associated with intermingled cultures as well. The work of Ibn Rushd mainly survived in Hebrew or Latin translation. This can be connected to the casually mentioned presence of Jews in Arab Spain in 2.8.28. According to Rushdie, Ibn Rushd was banned to a little village “full of Jews who could no longer say they were Jews” (5). To be more precise: Ibn Rushd lived in a place that can be described as a mixture of cultures. In 711 A.C. an invasion of the region Andalusia took place. The majority of the immigrants were Berbers, but also Egyptians and Syrians came to the area that we now call Spain. The Christian inhabitants of the area were either converted to Islam, or they preserved their Christianity, and to add to this mixture: the Jewish population adhered to their faith (Rehrmann 36-7). The immigration of Muslim Berbers caused a co-existence of Christian, Islamic, and Jewish cultures, meaning that an early medieval transcultural habitat was created. Ibn Rushd can therefore be seen as a philosopher from a transcultural context. That his work survived in Latin and Hebrew but less so in Arabic can perhaps be explained by the controversial nature of his work. The real history of Ibn Rushd is liberally interpreted in Rushdie’s novel, where the character Ibn Rushd is waken up from the death to argue again with his nemesis Ghazali. Ibn Rushd’s existing views are used in a fictional novel, his life being an inspiration for a story where he has fathered several children by a jinnia.

The idea that Rushdie’s novel 2.8.28 is transcultural, partly because of its intertextual reference to *Arabian Nights*, can be seen in several characteristics of both works. First of all, *Arabian Nights* is a transcultural work on its own account: various cultures have influenced the stories and made it into what it is now, the original text can no longer be traced. Secondly, Rushdie knows that *Arabian Nights* is influenced by several cultures and refers to various titles that have been used to name the story collection. Additionally, in his novel, Rushdie uses works from all over the world, thereby placing himself in a worldly context instead of a

national one. This is also the case with his characters: they are world-inhabitants who cross many borders of many kinds.

## *Chapter 2: The philosophies of Ibn Rushd and Ghazali*

The novel 2.8.28 has many layers in which different characters play a role. When looking at the division between rational philosophy and fundamentalism, two philosophers are important to look into. First of all, Ibn Rushd<sup>15</sup> will be discussed: a banned philosopher who lived together with a jinnia called Dunia. He is introduced in the first chapter of the book, which is called “The Children of Ibn Rushd”. In this chapter, it soon becomes clear that Ibn Rushd has a dispute with a man called Al-Ghazali<sup>16</sup> – or at least with the ideas of Ghazali since the man himself has been dead for over eighty-five years (*Two Years* 8). Ibn Rushd and Ghazali were also real Arabic philosophers who reflected on philosophy and the power of God. Rushdie uses their ideas and names in his own narrative, where he summarizes Ghazali’s argument the following: “Philosophy believed in the inevitability of causes and effects, which was a diminution of the power of God, who could easily intervene to alter effects and make causes ineffectual if he so chose” (8). On the other hand, Ibn Rushd is portrayed as someone who “tried to reconcile the words ‘reason’, ‘logic’ and ‘science’ with the words ‘God’, ‘faith’ and ‘Qur’an’, and he had not succeeded” (9). In order to give a more complete image of the dispute between the two philosophers it is important to examine their ideas and to contextualize these, besides the short description that is given in 2.8.28. Also, it is important to look at the current relevance of both philosophers.

### *Ghazali’s philosophy*

First of all, it is important to note that Ghazali was an Islamic mystic who wrote his work *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* as a summary and response to the views of Avicenna, in order to argue that philosophers – especially Avicenna and his followers – had gone astray regarding the role of the divine. Avicenna argued that God have made the natural laws and

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<sup>15</sup> His full name is “Abū I-Walīd Ibn Rushd” and he was known as Averroes in Latin; this name is commonly used in English texts (Adamson 179).

<sup>16</sup> Al-Ghazali is the abbreviation of “Abū Hāmid Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad al-Ghāzālī” and he was also known as Algazel in the Medieval Western world (Adamson 140). Hereafter he will be referred to as Ghazali.

that He knows their result, but this is different from the idea that God monitors every movement and event on earth. The ubiquity of God is at stake and this is one of the elements that Ghazali disagrees with regarding Avicenna's theory, therefore writing his *The Incoherence of Philosophers*. Adamson concludes that Ghazali "wants to uphold God's untrammelled power and choice [...] God can arbitrarily choose a moment for creating the world. That would be the clearest possible case of free choice" (150). This way, God could also have decided that creating the earth would not be necessary. On this point, Ghazali's philosophy differs from Avicenna's views. One could argue that Ghazali is therefore a fundamentalist: someone who upholds belief in a strict and literal way and beliefs in an omnipotent God. From Ghazali's perspective, the laws of nature do not always apply, simply because God can make the usual routine stop and thus miracles can exist. This is summarized by Adamson in the following way: "He [God] is still involved in every event, but not usually as the direct cause of the event – rather, because his tacit permission is required for the event to occur" (152). God is therefore in Ghazali's opinion the Supervisor who gives His permission for everything that happens. Sometimes a certain habit exists, but this can easily change when God chooses to disrupt such a pattern. Adamson explained this by using fire as an example that shows the balance between necessity and free will. God created fire and when a flame touches cotton, the cotton will burn. The burning cotton will be caused by the flame, not by God directly. However, God can decide that the cotton will not burn, thereby disrupting the normal way of nature and not making the burning necessary (152). In the introduction of this thesis, the etymology of reason was shortly mentioned, tracing it back to the Latin word *ratio*. The corresponding synonyms that *Google* suggests when looking at the etymology of reason, are the words logic and cause. The disruption of the status quo by miracle and the suggestion of a God's ability to start the world at any moment of His willing, do not match the words logic, cause, or reason. Ghazali's philosophy is therefore the opposite

of Ibn Rushd's rational philosophy, meaning that Ghazali can be associated with unreason, incoherence, and even fundamentalism.

### Ibn Rushd's philosophy

In 2.8.28 the same example of God preventing cotton from catching fire is used. Ibn Rushd asks Dunia what happens when a lighted stick connects with a ball of cotton and Dunia replies that the cotton will catch fire, because that is the way of it, and it would be stupid to believe that God can change this. Ibn Rushd reacts to this by stating that "He [Ghazali] would say that it was true faith [...] and that to disagree with it would be ... incoherent" (9). That Ibn Rushd uses the word incoherence here can be interpreted as deliberate, since Ghazali's work is called *The Incoherence of Philosophers*, while Ibn Rushd dubbed his work *The Incoherence of Incoherence*. In this work Ibn Rushd argues that "God is the creator of the universe insofar as he draws it from potentiality into the actuality of existence and also conserves it. Such is the case without entailing a temporal origination of the world and a starting moment of time" (Taylor 186). This point of view is close to Avicenna's, since both philosophers argue that God can be proved by the existence of the universe. However, where Avicenna stressed the necessity of events and their contingency, Ibn Rushd stated that "the failure of nature resides in the fact that it contains material elements and consequently, unlike eternal beings, is not constant in the same degree. Natural deformities are attributed to something defective in nature itself rather than a concatenation of causes" (Belo 157). This means that sometimes the creation can be faulty and therefore not everything is as determined as Avicenna claims it to be. Ibn Rushd's thoughts can be connected to an idea of divine causality and logic, establishing him as a rationalist philosopher (Taylor 197). The use of Ibn Rushd's philosophy is therefore closely connected to the idea of ratio, which situates him at the side of reason in 2.8.28.

## The role of the philosophers

Besides the dichotomy between reason and unreason, the use of these two philosophers as characters in a novel, as Rushdie did, can be explained as an overt affiliation with Islamic philosophy. However, the ideas of Ghazali are described as rather one-sided in 2.8.28, only from the perspective of the fictional Ibn Rushd, who thinks that Ghazali was “[a] great man, but an idiot too” (58-59). Le Guin’s review “A Modern *Arabian Nights*” of 2.8.28 summarizes the position of both philosophers by stating: “[Ghazali] placed the power of God above all earthly causes and effects”, whereas opposed to that “Ibn Rushd tried to reconcile reason and humane morality with God and faith, positing a kindly God and an un fanatic faith” (Le Guin). The positive portrayal of Ibn Rushd can be traced back to Rushdie’s own history. According to an interview by Alexandra Alter in *The New York Times*, the similarity of the names Rushdie and Rushd is not entirely coincidental. The father of Salman Rushdie changed his surname to Rushdie in honour of the philosopher and Rushdie himself got slightly obsessed with the ideas of Ibn Rushd as well (Alter). Although authors must be separated from their work, the admiration for Ibn Rushd would explain why he is portrayed so positively, whereas Ghazali is talked about more condescendingly.

Although Ghazali was critical about the ideas of Avicenna, the ideas of Ghazali were likewise sceptically received by Ibn Rushd. However, when Rushdie mentions that “the great philosopher Ibn Rushd [...] was formally discredited and disgraced on account of his liberal ideas, which were unacceptable to the increasingly powerful Berber fanatics” (5), he fails to mention that Ghazali’s books were banned by Berber fanatics as well, because Ghazali did not interpret the Quran literally (Attar 68). This complicates the idea of Ghazali as being a fundamentalist, since a fundamentalist by definition interprets a holy book literally. Yet, the two philosophers are instead positioned as opposites in Rushdie’s book. It can be concluded



that both philosophers hold conflicting views, therefore representing other conceptions of God's role in this world.

According to a review in *The Independent*, Ibn Rushd 's philosophy is seen as representing the good in the world, whereas Ghazali is situated at the side of evil (Sanai). In Rushdie's novel Ghazali frees Zumurrud Shah from a bottle, meaning that Ghazali was granted three wishes. In the battle between the deceased Ghazali and Ibn Rushd, Ghazali makes his wish known to the evil jinn: to instil fear among the people.<sup>17</sup> Yet, as mentioned before, the dichotomy of good and evil does not really cover the differences between the two philosophers. Both have founded their philosophy on the Islamic religion, and even Rushdie acknowledges this when it is stated in 2.8.28 that "[p]erhaps, as a godly man, [Ibn Rushd] would not have been delighted by the place history gave him, for it is a strange fate for a believer to become the inspiration of ideas that have no need for belief" (15). The ambiguity of a believer offering a philosophy that eventually leads to secularism, is not lost here. What is more, exactly this eventual explication of a philosophical stance is important to keep in mind when looking at the contraposition of Ibn Rushd and Ghazali. Although both share the same religious foundation, eventually they interpret the role of God in their own way. This leads to a rational philosophy for Ibn Rushd and for Ghazali to a more fundamentalist approach.

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<sup>17</sup> Fear is in 2.8.28 connected to fanaticism, see chapter three for an elaboration.

### *Chapter 3: The relevance of Islamic thought in 2017 and its relation to transculturality*

The following question arises: to what extent are both philosophers still relevant in 2017? Are they two interesting philosophers for Rushdie's case but otherwise insignificant, or are their ideas still important in contemporary society? The fact that Rushdie is an acclaimed author who has won literary prizes, such as the prestigious "The Best of the Booker" prize, adds to the significance of Ghazali and Ibn Rushd by mentioning them in his novel 2.8.28. While this means that the fame (or notoriety) of the philosophers could be restricted to historical times and Rushdie's novel, this is not the case.

#### Recent publications on Ghazali and Ibn Rushd

In January 2017 the influential magazine *Foreign Affairs* published Omar Saif Ghobash's article "Advice for Young Muslims" about the current proliferation of Islamophobia and extremism. Ghobash uses Ghazali as a role model for young Muslims and calls him "one of the greatest scholars of the Islam", especially because of his addition of spiritualism and faith to the Islamic religious experience (98). Unlike Rushdie's representation of Ghazali, Ghobash portrays him in a more positive way: as someone who contributed important thoughts on the perception of the world. On the other hand, a few years earlier, George Saliba acknowledged in "Age of Decline" that Ghazali was often considered the initiator of Islamic orthodoxy with *The Incoherence of Philosophers* being the symbolization of the triumph of religious thought (234). For example, the magazine *The Economist* highlights a few important thinkers in current society, such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, and Richard Dawkins, who think of Ghazali as being a role model for fanatics and a destroyer of intellectual inquiry (Gheblawi). This is unjust, however, according to Saliba, as the conflict paradigm between religion and reason was imported from the European example. Therefore, stating that Ghazali is responsible for the decline of rational thought is an exorbitant claim.

Although Ibn Rushd is portrayed in 2.8.28 as being more controversial than Ghazali, his reputation was eventually restored and his ideas of rationality became widely accepted. Now, roughly thousand years later, his name comes up as one of the philosophers who could be one of the counterparts to standard Western philosophers that are often used in education (Malik). Yet, the question can be asked whether Ibn Rushd differs that much from Western philosophers. After all, his philosophy is based partly on Aristotle's ideas and Aristotle is one of those 'white' philosophers who, according to *The Guardian*, is seen as too dominant in the current curriculum (Malik). In 2011, another article appeared, written by Robert Pasnau, who focussed on Ibn Rushd, or Averroes as he is called in Western Europe. The title "The Islamic Scholar Who Gave Us Modern Philosophy" shows how Ibn Rushd can be seen as an important Islamic scholar, whose influence is still present in the contemporary philosophy. An April 2017 symposium held at The University of Gent, where Ibn Rushd is mentioned as one of the philosophers in the Islamic world with a 'modern' rationalist view, can be seen as another confirmation of the reputation of Ibn Rushd as influential scholar (Lelli 38). Since both Ibn Rushd and Ghazali are well-known philosophers, books are still published on their ideas and how to read their works. Indeed, the articles mentioned above, especially the ones concerning Ghazali, can be found in non-academic magazines. This shows the enduring relevance of Ghazali and Ibn Rushd's philosophies, nearly a thousand years after they lived. Going back to Ghazali once again, it must be noted that Ghazali's philosophy as portrayed in his work *Incoherence of the Philosophers* "plays an important role not only in the history of Islamic theology but in the tradition of Greek and Western philosophy overall" (Griffel 206). The importance of this cannot only be found in the fact that the scope of Ghazali's influence is broader than just Islamic theology or philosophy, but it also argues that exchange between the Eastern and Western world existed, since Ghazali has played an important role in Western philosophy. Similarly, it is said of Ibn Rushd that his work "continued to draw the attention of

Western thinkers, and interest was reinforced by a second wave of translations and the printing of his translated works with those of Aristotle” (Taylor 182). Western thought can therefore not be seen as a unified cultural foundation. Rather, it can be argued that a cultural engagement between Islamic and Western thought exists.

### Voltaire and Islam

In Rushdie’s novel allusions are made to Islamic philosophy, but also to a work named *Candide*, which “is for many readers their first introduction to the Enlightenment” (Stewart 125). In light of cultural exchange, the Enlightenment is an important part of history. According to Perchard’s article “The Fatwa and the Philosophe: Rushdie, Voltaire, and Islam” there is a forgotten history of cultural engagement between Islamic and European worlds, especially during the Enlightenment – which is also the period when reason prevailed. What is more, Perchard argues that “[t]his history shows that, far from a fatal point of departure between Islam and West, the Enlightenment was in some ways a powerful moment of transculturation” (“The Fatwa and the Philosophe” 473). Voltaire can be seen as a good example of this transculturation, as he used Islam as a window to reflect on French society, and in particular on the institutional Christianity that shaped it (Quinn, 62). In addition to that, Voltaire’s work engaged with Islam and according to Ziad Elmarsafy, it was “used to trope tolerance, intellectual commitment, and war on the infâme” (81). From this perspective, Islam is not connected to unreason, decline on rational thought, or fundamentalism at all. An earlier work by Voltaire, called *Mohamet*, seems to indicate the opposite, as it portrays the prophet Muhammed as an “epitome of evil and fanaticism” (82). However, according to Elmarsafy, *Mohamet* must be interpreted as an attack on the church, rather than as an attack on Islam.

When looking at the allusion to Voltaire’s *Candide* in 2.8.28, there is just one phrase of Voltaire’s work cited: “*il faut cultiver son jardin*”. No further explanation of this phrase is given in the novel 2.8.28 itself. In his article “The Garden of Reason”, Perchard explains that

Candide's phrase means that everyone must tend to their own affairs (306). He argues that while Voltaire did not endorse apathy in this statement, many readers misinterpreted the phrase as such. Instead, Perchard connects the cultivated garden to the abandonment of wildness and unreason, which is replaced with restraint, tolerance, and reason. The relevance of the reference to *Candide*, is the fact that Voltaire's work connects to the philosophy that is discussed in 2.8.28 as well. Voltaire satirizes in *Candide* the idea that to doubt the wisdom of God is foolhardy (Stewart 126). The idea that all that happens is for the best and is evoked by God – even suffering – as suggested by influential Western philosophers, is rebuked by Voltaire. Ghazali, and with him philosophers such as Leibniz and Pope, see God as an unquestionable power, meaning that fundamentalism is also present in Western history. The gist of *Candide* on the role of God, is that it is opposed to the notion of a God who could prevent suffering, but who instead stands aside. Stewart claims that “suffering exists not because it is deserved, nor because God allows or is unable to prevent it, but because God, like his universe, is oblivious to it. If there is a purpose in anything, it is inaccessible to human reason” (134). The reference to *Candide* thus adds to the dispute between Ghazali and Ibn Rushd. At the same time, it shows a reader who is familiar with the context of *Candide* that Western philosophy has similar disagreements.

In chapter five the concept of Orientalism will be elaborated upon, but preluding to that, it must be known that the foundation of Orientalism is based upon an idea of rationalism and a separation between East and West, also in philosophical traditions. Yet, taking the examples above into account, there is no such thing as a rigid separation between East and West regarding rationalism and fundamentalism. All these elements lead to the notion of transculturality being present in Rushdie's novel, when looking at the combination of philosophies based upon Arabic thought and Voltaire's *Candide*.

## Rational thought and fundamentalism

What follows is the question how rational thought and fundamentalism can be connected to the Arabic thought that is present in 2.8.28. While the Enlightenment is obviously connected to a notion of reason, can it be said conversely that Arabic thought is not? According to Hassan Mahamdallie's review in *The Independent*, Rushdie's novel is the scene for a battle between good and evil, where "[t]he bad guys are ugly photo-fits for Bin Laden, Isis, barbarism, obscurantism, irrationality, bearded stupid preachers, misogynist inadequates and all those who have it coming to them" (Mahamdallie). Likewise, Alice Albinia writes in *The Financial Times* that Dunia tries to save the world of dark jinn, who are "responsible for horrors such as al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, Isis, and India's militant Hinduism, as well as more fanciful evils" (Albinia). In order to put this in context, it must be known that Ghazali in Rushdie's novel works together with the evil spirit Zummurud, meaning that Ghazali is situated at the same side as terrorist groups.

Arguably, the most influential terrorist group nowadays is ISIS, also known as IS (Islamic State). The threat of IS came close to Europe in November 2015, when Paris was shocked by an attack. However, that is not all: in Syria and Iraq a bloody war is going on. In Iraq, 18,800 people are killed by IS-related violence within a two-year ratio. According to the *BBC* "[b]eheadings, crucifixions and mass shootings have been used to terrorise their enemies. IS members have justified such atrocities by citing the Koran and Hadith, but Muslims have denounced them ("What is 'Islamic State'?"). The jihadist group that implemented Islamic Law wants to restore God's rule on earth and they do not shun violence. It suffices to say that their perception of the Quran could be seen as fundamentalist, interpreting every text literal.

In 2.8.28 almost the same words are used to describe the activities of the dark jinn as the *BBC* uses to describe the violent ways of IS. As the Great Ifrit Zummurud established his

own global jinn sultanate, he starts it off with “a wild international spree of decapitations, crucifixions, and stonings” (243). The violence continues when the jinn form an alliance with the Swots, who have mastered the art of forbidding things, such as art, elections, women’s rights, women’s uncovered faces, women’s education, and clean-shaven chins (227). To conclude that Rushdie is alluding to fanatical, fundamentalist, Muslims seems logical.

According to Kim Sengupta and Jerome Starkey in their article “Taliban in Policy Shift on Beards and Burqas” the Taliban, like the Swots in Rushdie, focussed on forbidding things and on top of that “women were only allowed outside with a male relative, men's beards had to be long enough to exceed a fist clasped at the chin, and anyone who broke the rules risked being beaten - or worse” (Sengupta and Starkey). Yet, the question can be asked whether applying a contemporary issue onto a work of fiction is justified. According to Bruce King’s article “Losing Paradise Now”, Rushdie’s novel is “not directly the author’s reply to those who sought his death for *The Satanic Verses* or even an allegory about the present conflict between the secular west and Islam” (228). Instead, Bruce King poses, it is a multi-narrative story where good fights bad without a deeper seriousness underneath the first layer, focussing more on the poetic element than seriously criticizing contemporary issues such as terrorism. Although it can be said that the novel sketches an image of a group that is comparable to the militant terrorist groups in the Middle-East, such as the Taliban, Bruce King does remind his reader that maybe more is needed to substantiate the claim that the novel 2.8.28 allegorizes the IS-situation of nowadays.

Still, there is an obvious reason to see the Swots in 2.8.28 as representatives of Islamic fanaticism – and without a doubt, fanaticism of any kind. This is important, as Rushdie’s personal opinion is that Islam has been radicalising for the last fifty years (Daniel 35). Looking at earlier novels written by Rushdie, such as his famous *Satanic Verses* and *Midnight’s Children*, it is claimed by Madeline Clements in her book *Writing Islam from a*

*South Asian Muslim Perspective* that Rushdie's novels contain a tendency to "satirise rather than to attempt realistically to represent religious "fundamentalisms", particularly of an Islamic persuasion" (34). Therefore, it can be said that the Swots are – although stereotypical represented and exaggerated – identifiable as religious fanatics, and most likely Islamic fundamentalists, as they have ideas similar to those of Taliban or IS extremists. The fact that Rushdie has stated that Islam is radicalizing in the real world, is reflected upon by the religious violence that is present in 2.8.28. The relevance of this novel can be found in violence that controls the world nowadays. Like in 2.8.28, religious fundamentalists are trying to take over by instilling fear in people, thus banning out love for God's sake. Eventually reason wins from fundamentalism and the fanatics are defeated, but only by the death of Gods is civility ultimately restored. The message for the reader in 2.8.28 can therefore be expressed as follows:

[T]he use of religion as a justification for repression, horror, tyranny, and even barbarism [...] led in the end to the terminal disillusion of the human race with the idea of faith. It has now been so long since anyone was gulled by the fantasies of those antique, defunct belief systems that the point may seem academic (269).

In order to let reason prevail, for rational thought to defeat fundamentalism, religion must be abandoned according to 2.8.28. This is the solution that is offered to get rid of fundamentalism, to expel the darkness inside of man.

Nevertheless, looking at the earlier discussed ideas of Ibn Rushd and Ghazali, it seems like there is not that much common ground to be found to associate Ghazali with fanatics who are likely to represent violent religious groups such as IS in the novel 2.8.28. Of course, the ideas of Ghazali, who argues that God is an omnipresent divine being who actively decides upon the faith of the world, differ from Ibn Rushd's claims that God has set the world into motion and this could be taken to indicate that Ghazali has a more fundamentalist point of



view. Later on in the novel, the two philosophers are re-introduced and Ghazali, who once set free Zumurrud the Great and in exchange got three wishes, orders from his grave that the jinni must “[i]nstil fear [...] only fear will move sinful Man towards God” (126). This adds to the image of Ghazali as being a religious fundamentalist, yet, this is not mentioned anywhere in Ghazali’s *The Incoherence of Philosophers*. A comment like this can be found in his work *The Book of Fear and Hope* though. What Ghazali argues in this work, is that fear can mean that someone understands the power of God and that the fear is therefore explainable. According to Michael Kinnamon’s book *The Witness of Religion in an Age of Fear*, the fear should live in an equilibrium with hope and it must inspire a live-long obedience instead of momentary feeling (50). In the novel 2.8.28, where Ghazali even mockingly tells a dark jinn to “[g]o also to those sentimental locations where it is said that God is love. Go and show them the truth” (126), the philosopher Ghazali is portrayed as a religious fanatic who believes in a God that should be feared. His philosophy is not rational: instead he believes in the omnipotence of an arbitrary God. Thus, it could be argued that he is positioned at the side of fundamentalism. To associate Ghazali with religious fanaticism depends on one’s interpretation, however; to interpret Ghazali, all of his work must be taken into account. Separate quotes will not offer a complete image of his ideas and philosophy. Rushdie has chosen to associate Ghazali with the dark jinn, the evil spirits that seem to represent terroristic groups and fundamentalists. Although Ghazali does interpret the Quran more literally than Ibn Rushd, the association with violent fundamentalists is not validated by Ghazali’s actual works: it is dubious and too far-fetched.

All in all, Ghazali’s work still generates interest: especially regarding the question whether Ghazali truly could be seen as the one who initiated decline of rational thought in Islamic philosophy. Blaming the downfall of a whole culture’s change on one man cannot rationally be explained of course, however, the suggestion that Ghazali’s philosophy could

have contributed exists. On the other hand, the role of Ghazali in 2.8.28 as the one helping fanatics and evil spirits is not agreeing with Ghazali's real opinions that can be found in his oeuvre. For the purpose of seeing the dichotomy between Ibn Rushd and Ghazali, it does not matter that much though. Instead, it clarifies the portrayal of Ghazali in contraposition to Ibn Rushd. This means that Ghazali can be connected to fundamentalism present in 2.8.28. Ibn Rushd on the other hand, is portrayed as one of the good guys and both in Rushdie's novel as in academic studies, Ibn Rushd is perceived as a rational thinker.

## Part 2- Magic Realism

### *Chapter 4: Magic realism in connection to transculturality and migrant literature*

Magic realism is a term used for literature that displays a world where “magic coexists with the real, though it does not erase it and lead the reader into fantasy, it frequently underscores the amazing – or apparently magical – nature of reality” (“The Latin American Boom” 144). The blurb of *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* by Salman Rushdie promises to meet these features of magic realism, when it is mentioned that New York will be the stage for extraordinary and supernatural events in the human world. The idea of mixing reality and fantasy can be seen as another border that is blurred in the novel 2.8.28. In order to look at this, the concept of magic realism will be explained. The second part of this chapter will look at the various cultures that are used in 2.8.28 and how this influences the presence of magic in the novel. It will be shown that both transculturality and magic realism are terms that complicate the separation between reality and fantasy, which leads to the idea that perhaps reason and unreason are not as divided as it may seem.

### **Magic Realism**

Magic realism is all about blurring borders. A realistic narrative is penetrated with elements of magic, according to the article “The Latin American Boom and the Invention of Magic Realism” by Wendy Faris, so it can focus on themes such as “love, pain, unconscious desires, individual or collective beliefs, family and communal ties, political atrocities” (143). Yet, this is not all: Mr. Geronimo is Indian by birth, Jimmy Kapoor and Storm Doe have Indian roots too, and Teresa Saca is the daughter of Spanish immigrants. As magic realist novels often contain at least two cultures in their narrative in order to generate the elements of magic (Faris 152), perhaps it is no wonder that all the Duniyat are of mixed heritage. They are the children of reason and magic, which enables them to reflect on themes that are not only relevant in Rushdie’s narrated world, but also in the reality of 2017. The combination of reason and

magic opens up the possibility to reflect on fundamentalism, rational thought, belief, and religious violence in contemporary society. However, as Faris acknowledges, the question what magic is remains relevant – especially when different cultures are involved. Magic realism is seeking to obliterate boundaries instead of offering a clear division between reality and fantasy. That the narrative is therefore often set in multiple cultures, has to do with the idea that there is one realist culture present and that the other culture provides the myths or non-realist tradition to represent the magic. In Rushdie's *28.28*, magic has managed to lodge itself deep inside the characters, as all characters are in one way or another related or influenced by jinni.

#### The presence of various cultures

One of the important features of magic realism can shed light on the relation between magic and non-Western culture. Magic realism is strongly connected to the idea of hybridity, and what is more, according to Faris, “magical realism’s radically hybrid texts frequently valorize indigenous voices silenced by colonialism, embodying a postcolonial stance and hence performing the cultural work of literary decolonization, highlighting problems of cultural interface” (“The Latin American Boom” 152-153). Not only are different cultures a common part of magic realist novels, most of the time various cultures are used in order to give a platform to cultures that have been suppressed or silenced. This already leads back to the concept of transculturality, and to be specific, migrant literature, which oftentimes strives to erase borders between different cultures in literature and in addition to that different backgrounds are used as inspiration for a narrative. The works that are based on different cultures are not functioning as the voice of ‘the other’ per se – a concept that will be elaborated on later – rather, the writers create narratives borrowing from all sorts of traditions all over the world.

Although this global approach seems logical, it is not so to all critics. Rushdie's work, for example, has been categorized multiple times as being commonwealth literature (*Imaginary Homelands* 61). According to Rushdie, commonwealth literature is a term that is used to categorize younger English literature and is therefore placed below English literature, indicating a certain inferiority (*Imaginary Homelands* 66). The commonwealth author is seen as someone who can offer an authentic voice of a nation, instead of drawing from various traditions. To call Rushdie's work commonwealth literature, is to categorize it and place it within fixed borders. This is not in concordance with the concept of transculturality, migrant literature, or magic realism. All those terms are closely focussed on the idea of hybridity and battling rigid borders. Therefore, it is important to look at Rushdie's novel *28.28* in a way that does justice to the different traditions present, while recognizing that the story does not contain the voice of the 'other'. Rather, it is a way to incorporate different cultures and traditions. As mentioned above, however, Faris claims that nearly all magic realist novels contain two cultures in their narrative to "generate the elements of magic in the narrative" (152), which could be seen as an orientalist approach if it can be stated that magic traces back to an idea of a primitive or exotic culture.

### *Chapter 5: Magic realism and Orientalism*

This brings us to the concept Orientalism, which is explained in Edward Said's book *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient*. The title already hints at the meaning of Orientalism: it concerns the perception of the Orient – also called the 'other' or a non-Western civilization – through Western eyes. Said argues that the Occident is always portrayed as more powerful and sensible than the Orient in texts, appearing in a diverse array of Oriental ideals like sexuality, cruelty, splendour and despotism that imply the greater strength of the Occident (4). When looking at these characteristics, it must be noted that the idea of another culture's presence generating the ability of magic to happen in magic realist novels can be condescending.

#### *The Orient and magic*

Richard King argues in his book *Orientalism and Religion* that the religious East is closely associated with "the magic, the mystery, and the sense of the spiritual that they perceive to be lacking in modern Western culture" (97). This does place the Western world at the side of the rational, the realist approach. Indeed, Faris acknowledges that there have been critiques on the concept of magic realism, precisely because of the orientalist notion it carries. In her article "The Question of the Other: Cultural Critiques of Magic Realism" she states that magic realism is praised by some for its decolonizing features, yet "denigrated by others as a commodifying kind of primitivism that, like the Orientalism analysed by Edward Said [...] relegates colonies and their traditions to the role of cute, exotic, psychological fantasies" (101). The culture that facilitates magic being brought into the story could therefore be interpreted as being the inferior culture, placed below the rational, realist other culture that is present in the novel – this being either a general Western culture, or a more specific other culture that uses traditions of an indigenous culture as its magical counterpart.

In the case of 2.8.28, there are several cultures present. The first part of the novel is set in Andalus, which is a place where several cultures meet and live together. The second part of the novel is set in New York and its counterpart, Peristan, the residence of jinn. Important characters in the novel are all part jinni, part Indian, or second generation immigrants. The feature of hybridity that is associated with magic realism is not lacking in 2.8.28. Yet, the question remains which culture brings magic into the narrative, and whether it is done in a way that would connect to the concept of orientalism. Only the descendants of Dunia show a capacity for magic, and in addition to that, they are all of mixed heritage. Yet, merely looking at their earthly origin does not suffice, as a multitude of mentioned characters in 2.8.28 are said to be of mixed heritage. Thus, magic is not a feature that is reserved for the Dunyazad, due to their multicultural background. Instead, magic enters the realist setting, when the fairy world and rationalism collide.

Furthermore, to connect magic to the Orient in the novel can be debatable because of the philosophy that is at the foundation of the novel. Richard King, who has already been cited above, connected Eastern religion to the notion of magic instead of the realist. Yet, Ibn Rushd and Ghazali are both Islamic philosophers and although they originate from different areas, the magic they could bring into the novel would then be based on the same belief system. The vast dichotomy between faith and reason, as often present in magic realist novels (Faris 148), would not be applicable to 2.8.28 when looking at just the religious aspects. However, Ibn Rushd, as mentioned in chapter two, is seen as an Islamic rationalist philosopher who does not fit the distinction between faith and reason. The classification of the East as being magic, mysterious, primitive, and the opposite of Western culture does not match Ibn Rushd's presence in the novel. Instead, the Islamic philosopher Ghazali can be connected to this Orientalist notion of Eastern religion being mystic.

### Ibn Rushd and Ghazali from an Oriental perspective

As explained before, both philosophers had different ideas on the omnipotence of God, which in Rushdie's novel is supplemented with radical views on faith by Ghazali. Where Ibn Rushd tries to reconcile reason and faith, Ghazali calls faith "our gift from God and reason is our adolescent rebellion against it" (58). Revisiting Richard King's earlier statement, where he poses that Eastern religion provides the magic and mystery that the Western culture lacks (97), it is clear that this idea cannot be connected to the ideas of Ibn Rushd. If God has set the world into motion but does not actively decide the fate of humankind, neither magic nor mystery connects to this. Ghazali on the other hand is described as an Islamic mystic, or *sufi*. This means that besides a rational approach to religion, Ghazali believed that also a spiritual and more experiential approach was needed (Marmura 137-140). Ghazali's perspective, that God can randomly choose when to perform a miracle, thereby creating mystery and interrupting the established laws of nature, is more in line with an Oriental explication of Eastern religion.

In Rushdie's novel, this distinction between the rational and irrational is present as well. 2.8.28 shows how faith and religion can be based on reason, yet, it also shows that this is not necessarily the case. Some religious aspects may connect to primitivism and fundamentalism. An example can be found in the fact that, as was mentioned above, Ghazali is the one who started the decline of rational thought in Islamic philosophy. Here, his views on the role of God, the involvement of God in everyday life, and the possibility of miracles to happen are the opposite of realist thinking. By founding his ideas on reason and science, Ibn Rushd counters the presumption that Eastern or Islamic philosophy is mystical. As mentioned earlier, reason is typically connected to Western culture. Richard King also argues that reason is at the core of Western philosophy, as can be found when looking at the Greek philosophers. However, Richard King argues that there has been no attention to the mystical influences on



important figures in early Greek thought. Therefore, the sharp distinction between philosophy (the rational) and mysticism (the irrational) is an artificial one created by Western thinkers (29). The narrative of 2.8.28 shows this distinction between rationality and mysticism too, therefore corresponding with the Western perspective on the Orient. The portrayal of Ghazali as being a fanatic fundamentalist connects to this dichotomy, especially as Richard King claims that, besides the magic and mysterious Eastern religion, its other characteristic<sup>18</sup> is often that of militant fanaticism (97). Nevertheless, to claim that there is a definite separation of faith and reason would be unjust. Ibn Rushd remains an Islamic philosopher who has based his belief on reason, thereby complicating this contrast between East and West. To state that the whole novel 2.8.28 portrays an Oriental approach to religion, can therefore not be proved. The unreason is not as much connected to Islamic faith as it is to fundamentalism.

#### The origin of magic in 2.8.28

Leaving the idea that religion provides the Oriental aspect in 2.8.28 behind, another area must be looked into. In the novel itself it is stated that after Dunia returned to her fairy world, her descendants spread over the earth and “[a] high proportion of the survivors ended up in the great North American continent, and many others in the great South Asian subcontinent” (15). If the theory of Orientalism would be applicable to this novel, the obvious guess would be that the magic started in that South Asian subcontinent, because of its colonised past and it being part of the Orient. However, in the novel strangenesses begin in the North American continent. Admittedly, Mr. Geronimo is the first character that is struck by the strangenessess and he is born in India, however, the strangenessess have more to do with his supernatural ancestor than his place of birth. The one who facilitated all the magic in the novel is therefore not Mr. Geronimo, nor one of the others with a mixed heritage, but it is Dunia, who mothered

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<sup>18</sup> The two characteristics are not overlapping though. Richard King argues that ‘the mystical’ is interwoven with the fanatic, yet, they are rarely associated because spiritual detachment causing political activism is an ambiguous phenomenon.

a mixed breed of humans and jinn and whose name is an allusion to the text *Arabian Nights*. The use of *Arabian Nights* indicates that the literary foundation of 2.8.28 leads back to a South-Asian and Arabic tradition, as mentioned before. Yet, this is not all according to Perchard, who argues that the use of *Arabian Nights* also facilitates Rushdie's "literary cultural hybridity in a transnational tradition born of Scheherazade's tales, which intermingles the magical and the real [... and it] has become the very framework within which Rushdie explores the new ideological freight of his magical realism, the battle of reason against unreason" ("The Garden of Reason" 309). If *Arabian Nights* is the place where magic and realism comes together, it could be argued that Rushdie's work can be seen as Orientalist because of his use of this frame - even though Rushdie himself is of Indian origin. In that case, Western culture would equal reason and Eastern elements would be connected to magical elements and perhaps even unreason.

However, this idea would not do justice to Rushdie's novel. First of all, looking at *Arabian Nights* as a representation of the Orient ignores the transcultural nature of the text. The European influences on *Arabian Nights* indicate that this work is a mixture between East and West. Therefore, the use of this text in itself precludes binary oppositions between Western and Eastern or South Asian and European cultures. Besides that, Faris argues that realist and fantasy realms question the colonial subjugation and show the confusion of the colonised, who question the political system and thus implement in their narration a divine intervention ("The Question of the Other" 106). The fantasy realm is therefore no reference that establishes the idea of an exotic Orient, but instead a way to give a voice to the colonised. Furthermore, Faris claims that magic realism is not the tradition of realism being enriched with indigenous voices, but it goes beyond that and is used by writers of both sides of the cultural divides ("The Question of the Other" 116). This means that the idea of magic realism is not that of a realist narrative which is enriched with magical elements, but that magic

realism has become a way to introduce narratives that include different voices of society – without one voice being more significant than others.

Besides that, in the work *Lies that Tell the Truth* written by Hegerfeldt, it is stated that in works of Rushdie conventions are presented that shape social reality, which instead of offering a Western view on the East, show them the other way round (239). Hence, instead of establishing the idea of the Orient as being the ‘lesser’ culture, it can be used as a means to deconstruct the colonial ideas in Rushdie’s work. Not only *The Satanic Verses* can be approached from this angle, as Hegerfeldt does: his latest novel *2.8.28* fits this idea as well. The descendants of Dunia are all of Oriental or mixed heritage and they can resist the attacks of the evil jinn and fight against them. Their abilities are used to fight the fanatics, the unreason, whereas from an Orientalist perspective they should be the ones that are the unreasonable. To mix this up, to instead make them the saviours who end the strangenesses, does not match this idea: they are the ones to save reason. This reversal provides the perspective that the use of different cultures in magic realism does not always constitute another orientalist approach to literature – especially not when looking at Rushdie’s texts.

*Chapter 6: The use of magic realism in 2.8.28 and intertextuality*

That Rushdie's text 2.8.28 matches several aspects of magic realism in the cultural area is already briefly mentioned above. However, more can be said about 2.8.28 as a magic realist novel, especially when the use of *Arabian Nights* is looked upon as an intertext. While the cultural implications have already been reviewed, there are more areas of interest to the present discussion of magic realism in Rushdie's work.

*Literary devices that introduce magic into a realist setting*

In 2.8.28 the fictional world is based on the real world: a common feature in English language magic realist texts, according to Anne Hegerfeldt (75). Set in New York, the narrative seems to be written with a realist setting until an apocalyptic storm appears and jinn enter through slips between alternate universes to wreak havoc. In order to escape the realist conventions, the text often alludes to a marvellous narrative, or a fairy tale. Hegerfeldt claims that this is also the case with *Arabian Nights*, which can "play a role as intertext, although magic realist fiction more frequently exploits the frame story of Scheherazade for a 'theory' of narrative than the tales themselves for motifs" (81). This means that an allusion to *Arabian Nights* is often a way to import magic in a world which appears to be similar to the world that the reader is living in. Jinn who are captured in glass bottles, spells, and flying carpets are all recycled elements of *Arabian Nights* that return in 2.8.28.

Nevertheless, there are several ways to introduce the marvelous in a realist narrative. Commonly used tactics are using a fairy tale opening for the narrative but after the phrase "once upon a time" the narrative returns to a world similar to the reader's, or by introducing a legend which then turns out to be true (Hegerfeldt, 84). Rushdie starts 2.8.28 with an introduction to the nature of jinn, stating that "ancient stories said, slanderously, that the jinn lived among us here on earth" (3). Thereby Rushdie chooses for the latter introduction, starting off with characteristics of jinn – who "live in their own world, separated by ours by a

veil” (3). After this, the philosopher Ibn Rushd is introduced and he was once as real as the reader her- or himself, living on this very earth. Yet, the marvelous seeps into this recognizable world by the introduction of Dunia, whose name is not only a clear reference to Scheherazade’s sister and thus to *Arabian Nights*, but who is, more importantly, a jinnia. Here, the tension between fantasy and reality takes shape, because “[t]he magic realist text normalizes or naturalizes the fantastic by rendering it in the same vein of historical reporting which usually signals that, in this narrative at least, one is safe from untoward encounters with the supernatural and other unrealistic excesses” (Hegerfeldt 88). That 2.8.28 does not offer this consolation becomes clear when one continues reading the novel. Strangenesses that continued for two years, eight months, and twenty-eight nights started with a storm of apocalyptic proportions.<sup>19</sup> The magic arrives with grandeur and lasts for a total count of 1,001 nights. As mentioned before, *Arabian Nights* is also known as *1,001 Nights* and thus an allusion is present.

#### Similarities between 2.8.28 and *Arabian Nights*

The *Arabian Nights* elements alluded to in the plot of 2.8.28, as foundation for marvels to appear in the narrative, are diverse. As Hegerfeldt stated: the story of Scheherazade is more often used as a motif than that true references to the Scheherazade’s tales are present. However, in 2.8.28 both Scheherazade’s own story and the stories she tells play a role, although this depends on the particular version of *Arabian Nights* that is used. Earlier in this thesis, it was mentioned that the text has been influenced and altered on many occasions, for example by European translators, such as Antoine Galland and Sir Richard Burton. Burton is closely associated with Orientalism, because his work “seized on the racist and sexist

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<sup>19</sup> The notion of nature was once connected to the idea of magic realism, yet stories are now increasingly urban according to Faris (147). She states too that ecological concerns will become more and more popular in the genre, but this thesis will not look into this part of magic realism due to remaining coherence in this thesis.

elements in the *Nights* and embroidered them” (Irwin 35). Which version Rushdie uses in 2.8.28 is not clear, but his allusions are nonetheless recognizable.

One example of this has to do with the setting of both worlds. The realist part of the narrative is set in Andalus and New York. It is mentioned that Mr. Geronimo originates from Bombay, yet, no marvels happen in that setting. The magic world, where Dunia is from, is called Peristan, fairyland, or Mount Qâf. This mountain is described in Lyon’s version of *Arabian Nights* as “a legendary mountain located at the end of the world, or in some versions one that encircles the earth” (967). The realm of the marvellous and magic is therefore closely connected to the literary text *Arabian Nights*. The realist settings, such as Andalus and New York, are penetrated with unreason and the magic world – but it has to be noted that unreason is not always the same as the magic present in the story. First of all, Andalus is said to be transcultural, as is argued in the first part of this thesis. What is more, the influence of unreason in Andalus is visible. Not only by the presence of Dunia, rather, the unreason is connected to the condemners of Ibn Rushd’s ideas, as they refuse to accept a rational philosophy. Dunia, on the other hand, agrees with Ibn Rushd’s philosophy, regardless of her supernatural origin. The claim that all supernatural beings in the novel are unreasonable because they represent magic, would appear to be a weak one. Instead, Berbers have banned Ibn Rushd’s philosophy because his work is not in agreement with the Quran. They are fundamentalists who refuse to listen to the voice of reason.

The other realist setting, New York, is described as being “the capital of the world” (28). The United States, once a colony itself, is seen as part of the Occident<sup>20</sup> and thus as a rational Western country. Still, much of those parts set in New York take place either at La Incoerenza, also known as ‘Incoherence’, or in Baghdad, the building where Mr. Geronimo lives. That Baghdad can be connected to the Orient will be no surprise, since it is literally

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<sup>20</sup> Lewis and Wigen describe in *The Myth of Continents* how The United States and Canada were first regarded as an overseas annex of Western civilization, while after the Second World War, Western Europe lost its position of primary geographical referent of the West to those overseas areas.

named after the capital of Iraq. The borders between East and West are dissolving by the penetration of Oriental names into the Western capital. Of those places, La Incoerenza is the most interesting case to look into. Perchard argues that “[b]ordering on the *Arabian Nights*, Voltaire’s *Candide*, and medieval Islamic disputes over faith and philosophy, the realm of fantasy and the sphere of reason, this garden becomes the arena, in which the novel’s climactic battle is fought” (“The Garden of Reason” 315). This quote shows that Perchard sees the garden as a point where both reason and unreason come together. *Candide*, written during the Enlightenment, is often quoted in 2.8.28. These “frequent references to Voltaire’s *Candide* situate the novel in a tradition of eighteenth century picaresque satire mingled with sly references to real-life contemporary and historical events [...] Rushdie is working partly in the formal legacy of the eighteenth century” (“The Garden of Reason” 305). As discussed earlier, the Enlightenment was, according to Perchard, a moment in history of cultural exchange between Arabic and Western thought, which indicates transculturality. Besides that, Voltaire used Islam to criticize Christianity and Voltaire’s ideas show that both religions have their fanatics.

When looking at the consequences for magic realism that working in a legacy of the Enlightenment brings, it must be stressed again that there was a strong emphasis on reason during the Enlightenment. Yet, the Western rational culture has its own fundamentalists, and the reference to *Candide* adds to the notion that the Enlightenment is not free from unreason. It was also during the Enlightenment that “*The Arabian Nights* were steadily abridged, bowdlerised, and adapted for the consumption of children, and the figure of Scheherazade and her frame narrative systematically marginalised and reduced” (“The Garden of Reason”, 313). Yet, in 2.8.28 this diminution of *Arabian Nights* is not visible. Instead, *Arabian Nights* offers a framework of importance. The garden where the battle between reason and unreason is fought is a “thousand-and-one-acre La Incoerenza property” (39), described as “a marriage of

heaven and hell” (36), and cultivated by Mr. Geronimo. The saying *il faut cultiver son jardin*, referring to Voltaire’s eighteenth century work *Candide*, is no longer connected to reason alone as motifs from *Arabian Nights* penetrate even the symbolical garden. Yet this does not mean that the end of rational thought is near. Rather, it puts emphasis on the tension between reason and unreason by using *Arabian Nights* as enabler of magic into the narrative, while simultaneously using these magic elements to rescue reason from its demise.

### The graphic novel and magic realism

It must be noted that *Arabian Nights* is not the only work that 2.8.28 refers to. A more recent genre, the graphic novel, plays an important role regarding textual references. The reason why a whole genre is referred to instead of one text is because of the multiple works that are mentioned in one breath. Where *Arabian Nights* is an example of Oriental literature and *Candide* is a work of the Enlightenment, both works posit 2.8.28 in a certain literary tradition. A more contemporary allusion in 2.8.28 is to Marvel, DC, and Titan. These publishers are known for their graphic novels and subsequent movies, whose classic feature is that of a hero or villain in possession of supernatural powers. In the case of 2.8.28, one of Dunia’s descendants creates the fictional Natraj Hero, whose superpower is creation through dance. Yet, this image is used by an evil jinn to scare Jimmy Kapoor. The comic figure coming to life is another example of magic entering the realist realm. The reference to the graphic novel genre is therefore, like the use of *Arabian Nights*, a way to merge the magic with the real. This time, the magic is not related to Eastern culture in any way. The graphic novel originated in the United States, which is significant for the blurring of borders between East and West in 2.8.28. Magic is no longer restricted to non-Western narratives. Besides that, Baetens and Frey argue in their book *The Graphic Novel: An Introduction* that “[l]iterary fiction in the 1990s and 2000s playfully blurred borders of traditional notions of high and low culture and readily indulged in using comics and graphic novels as a basis for work or helpful backdrop”



(196). The reference to Marvel, which is not only the name of a publisher but also a synonym for miracle, literally enables marvellous things to happen. The border between reality and magic is blurred when Natraj Hero enters the bedroom of Jimmy Kapoor in Queens and, in addition to that, so is the border between high and low culture. The intermingled dualism that is part of the structure in magic realist novels can again be recognized.

#### Characters adding to the tension between reason and unreason

Besides the setting and multiple narratives that portray tension, even more complicated matters can be found when looking at the characters. Dunia was “always asking for stories” (11), as was her namesake. Ibn Rushd takes the role of a sort of Scheherazade, yet, his stories are putting them in danger instead. Ibn Rushd is familiar with *Hazar Afsaneh*, or *One Thousand Stories* – which coincidentally also shows that Rushdie knows that more versions and stemmas of *Arabian Nights* have existed – and knows that the original stories are told to save lives. Yet, in 2.8.28 this is not said to be the only function of the stories: they are “told against death, to civilise a barbarian” (11). The comparison of Ibn Rushd and Scheherazade leads thereby to the idea that Ibn Rushd’s stories are also told in order to educate. So when Dunia asks for a story and Ibn Rushd starts telling about philosophy, which “[is] incapable of proving the existence of God” (8) and talks about the dispute between him and Ghazali, this can be interpreted as being an attempt to civilise the supernatural being – reason trying to cultivate the unreason.

Yet, there is more to the coexistence of the magic and the realist, as it “frequently underscores the amazing – or apparently magical – nature of reality” (“The Latin American Boom 144). The interplay between Ibn Rushd and Dunia is therefore not just an attempt to let reason rule and to erase all marvels: this becomes clear as Dunia answers Ibn Rushd’s lesson with the supposition that reason, logic, and science “possess a magic that makes God unnecessary” (9). This shows that Dunia, although she is supernatural, is not the voice of

unreason. The unreason is therefore in this case not connected to *Arabian Nights* – that story just provides a setting. To enhance this statement, one could look to the function of *Arabian Nights* itself. According to Irwin, this “may have been a wonderful piece of nonsense designed to enthrall an audience of children, yet, at the same time, the adults listening to the same story could recognize social facts and aspects of everyday reality” (180). The magic in the story is appealing to the reader, yet, another layer exists and is used to shed light on social facts and aspects of reality.

Hegerfeldt states that this phenomenon of using stories to explain the world is closely connected to the idea of magic realism, where “[m]ythos and logos as the two basic modes of knowledge production are presented not as successive and mutually exclusive, but as simultaneous and complementary” (188). The story told by Ibn Rushd could be seen as logos, connected with reason, yet when expanding the circle to look at the bigger narrative in 2.8.28, it becomes clear that his rational philosophy, the logos, is braided into a mythical story. The tension between reason and unreason, the rational versus the irrational, fanatics opposed to moderate believers, is needed for the reader to gain knowledge to look at the world.

## Conclusion

Rushdie's novel *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights* ends with an epilogue where most of the storylines are wrapped up. Dunia leaves the 'real' world and returns to Fairyland and Mr. Geronimo writes "*In Coherence*, a plea for a world ruled by reason, tolerance, magnanimity, knowledge, and restraint" in conjunction with lady Philosopher (283). It looks like reason does prevail, with the help of marvellous beings.

This thesis researched how magic realism and transculturality were used to portray the tension between rational thought and fundamentalism in *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*, written by Salman Rushdie. The idea that rationality is inherently a concept that can be connected to Western culture is contested in 2.8.28. Instead, hybrid cultures are presented.

The first chapter looked into transculturality: a term that is closely connected to crossing cultural borders. The eclectic composition of cultures means that nothing is foreign anymore, everything is within reach. Transcultural writers establish their work therefore on several literary traditions, with Rushdie serving as an example here by his alluding to *Arabian Nights*, *Candide*, and *Marvel* in 2.8.28. The rootlessness that is a characteristic of transculturality can be seen in Rushdie's own life, but also in his literary work. Mr. Geronimo is literally rootless, levitating above the earth. Not only are geographical borders crossed, but the boundaries between reality and fantasy are also blurred. This is also the case when looking at the philosophies of Ghazali and Ibn Rushd. They really existed, but their work is incompletely depicted in 2.8.28: it is moulded to fit the fictional narrative. The tension between reason and unreason makes a tentative entrance.

The second chapter shows how the philosophies of Ibn Rushd and Ghazali are contrasted in the novel, including comments from characters that show the fundamentalist nature of Ghazali or praise the rationalist philosopher Ibn Rushd. Yet, both philosophers

believed in a supernatural being. Even though their way of arguing may have differed, in the end they both believe in something that is not really comprehensible from a rational perspective: a God.

That is why the third chapter deals with the contemporary importance of both philosophies. In order to do so, it was important to note that the Enlightenment was a time where transculturalisation occurred, and that Rushdie's novel refers to both Islamic philosophers and to *Candide* by Voltaire. The notion of Ibn Rushd being a rationalist, and a gardener, definitely situates him at the side of reason. Ghazali, on the other hand, is connected to unreason. Nowadays, he is associated by some with the decline of rational thought; in Rushdie's work he is portrayed as a religious fanatic. This shows that, although Ibn Rushd and Ghazali originate from the same belief, they do have separate stances and therefore they mix up the idea of a unified Arabic philosophy and religion, which is important for the fifth chapter.

The second part of this thesis focusses on magic realism and as is already mentioned in the first chapter, borders between reality and fantasy are crossed in 2.8.28. Reason is closely connected to a sense of reality, the earthly. Magic, however, is unreasonable, a disruption of normality. The hybridity in 2.8.28 creates an ambiguous battlefield where unreason is challenged by supernatural creatures and allows for travel between fantasy realms and cities that resemble the reader's reality.

In chapter five, the focus is on Orientalism. This concept deals with the presumption that Western culture is based on reason and ratio, whereas the East represents magic and mysticism. A tension exists in 2.8.28, though, because an Islamic philosophy is used as example of rationalism, while Western culture is under the influence of magic. There is no clear division between East and West: instead, they collide.

The last chapter brings all these reasonable and unreasonable strands of transculturality, magic realism, and intertextuality together, to claim that reason and unreason are not opposed to one another, but rather, each are complementary. The blurring of boundaries that typifies both transculturality and magic realism is therefore a way to merge reason and unreason.

Of course, this is just a limited overview of the numerous theories that can be applied to 2.8.28. The excess of allusions, themes, and motifs that are present in this work would provide enough material for a thousand-and-one more theses. When looking at borders that have been crossed in this work, I have ignored the relation between urban scenery and nature that collide. This can be researched by anyone with an interest in ecocriticism – a theory that can be applied to this book with ease – yet this would overbroaden the scope of this work. I have not analysed all references that are present, although every single one of them opens up a new way of interpreting this novel.

Instead, I have focussed on reason and unreason in this work; on the reality and magic that become intertwined and battle fanaticism. 2.8.28 is a complicated story, to say it with the words of Rushdie: it is “a story from out past, from a time so remote that we argue sometimes whether we should call it history or mythology. Some of us call it a fairy tale. But on this we agree: to tell a story about the past is to tell a story about the present” (207). The mythical, historical, and magical elements are all present in Rushdie’s novel *Two Years Eight Months and Twenty-Eight Nights*. Yet, recognizing this may not be the most important: to read the book from a rational perspective is.

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