

Suhrawardī, Ibn ‘Arabī and the World of Image

One Term, Different Meanings

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of a world of image, or imaginable world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), supposes a world beyond our earthly world, to be reached in sleep, meditation or after death, consisting of non-physical (imagined) bodies. This is, at least, how the philosophers principally responsible for this idea envisioned it – Ibn Sīnā (d.1037/428), Suhrawardī (d.1191/587), and Shahrazūrī (d.≥1288/687). A large number of intellectuals in the centuries afterwards received the idea, and it has in fact remained a relevant notion for Muslim thinkers up until today.¹ The term also appears in the writings of Ibn ‘Arabī and his commentators. Among scholars there is a widespread belief that Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī are talking about the same world of image, implying that Suhrawardī influenced Ibn ‘Arabī. This was first and most forcefully suggested by Henry Corbin in the 1960s.²

1. E.g. see the marginal comments by Ashtiyani in Mullā Ṣadrā, *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya*. Edited by J. Ashtiyani, Mashhad: Meshed University Press, 1967; Lāhījī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq, *Risālah-i nūrīya dar ‘ālam-i mithāl*. Edited by J. Ashtiyani, Mashhad: Dānishgāhī Mashhad, 1972.

2. The most notable publications in this regard are Corbin, H., *L’imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d’Ibn ‘Arabī*. Paris: Flammarion, 1958; Corbin, H., *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection: De l’Iran mazdéen a l’Iran shī‘ite*. Paris: Buchet/Chastel, 1960; Corbin, H. ‘Mundus Imaginalis ou l’imaginaire et l’imaginal.’ In *Face de Dieu, face de l’homme*. Paris: Flammarion, 1983, pp.7–40 [the essay is dated March 1964]. Fazlur Rahman helped too: Rahman, F., ‘Dreams, Imagination, and ‘Ālam al-Mithāl,’ *Islamic Studies* (1964): pp.167–80; Rahman, F., *Selected Letters of Shaikh*

Ever since then this belief has been repeated many times and can still be found in recent scholarship.³ Corbin ignored the fact that Suhrawardī himself never used the term *'ālam al-mithāl*, and asserted in many different publications that this term stood for an idea that was common to both medieval thinkers, and was to be translated as 'imaginal world' or *mundus imaginalis*. He insisted on this because 'Latin terminology gives the advantage of providing us with a technical and fixed point of reference.'⁴ This can be a great advantage but can also be counterproductive, as is the case here. Applying the same term to different thinkers with such a fixed meaning to it effectively leaves no space for tailoring the meaning of the term to each unique situation. Corbin had no problem with this as his focus was not on tracing the history of ideas. He claimed that 'our

Aḥmad Sirhindī. Karachi: Iqbal Academy, 1968, p. 62.

3. Nakamura, K., 'Imām Ghazālī's Cosmology Reconsidered with Special Reference to the Concept of 'Jabarūt.' *Studia Islamica* 80 (1994): pp. 29–46; Naeem, F.S., 'The Imaginal World (*'Ālam al-Mithāl*) in the Philosophy of Shāh Walī Allāh al-Dihlawī,' *Islamic Studies* 44, no. 3 (2005): 363–90; Quinn, J.F., 'The Imaginal World, Mullā Ṣadrā and Islamic Aesthetics.' In *Philosophy, Islamic Views & Modern Attitudes*. Edited by A.N. Baqershahi, Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute Publication, 2006, pp. 59–70; Dinani, G.E. 'The World of Imagination.' In *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm*. Edited by A.-T. Tymieniecka, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, pp. 177–82; Azadpur, M., 'The Sublime Visions of Philosophy: Fundamental Ontology and the Imaginal World (*'Ālam al-Mithāl*),' In *Islamic Philosophy and Occidental Phenomenology on the Perennial Issue of Microcosm and Macrocosm*, edited by A.-T. Tymieniecka, Dordrecht: Springer, 2006, pp. 183–201; Azadpur, M., *Reason Unbound: On Spiritual Practice in Islamic Peripatetic Philosophy*. New York: SUNY Press, 2011; Landolt, H., 'Les idées platoniciennes et le monde de l'image dans la pensée du Ṣayh al-Iṣrāq Yahyā al-Suhrawardī (c.1155–1191).' In *Miroir et savoir: La transmission d'un thème platonicien, des Alexandrins à la philosophie arabo-musulmane*, edited by D. De Smet, M. Sebti, and G. De Callataÿ, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2008, pp. 233–50; Meisami, S., *Mulla Sadra*. Oxford: One-world Publications, 2013, p. 54.

4. Corbin, H. 'Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal.' In *Swedenborg and Esoteric Islam*. Translated by L. Fox, West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995, p. 1.

historical, evolutionary and linear viewpoint is the result of a one-dimensional mental structure,' adding that 'our authors see things from a different point of view.'⁵ Ever since, the term 'imaginal' has stuck and is used by many scholars without further reflection. In this way, they effectively proliferate the assumption that Suhrawardī and Ibn 'Arabī (and their respective commentators) share in the notion of a world of image.

Such being the case, it is surprising that prominent scholars such as Nasr, Chittick and Rosenthal remain completely silent about Suhrawardī in their investigations of the sources of Ibn 'Arabī's thinking.⁶ Claude Addas' amazement is a fitting summary of the situation. Speaking of Ibn 'Arabī she writes:⁷

Through his Iranian friends and disciples [...] he could not possibly have remained unfamiliar with the works of the Shaikh al-Ishrāq [...]. But a search through the corpus of Ibn 'Arabī's writings for even the slightest reference to the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* or any other of Suhrawardī's writings reveals nothing at all.

With the assumption of Addas finding no direct evidence, the suggestion that Suhrawardī and Ibn 'Arabī were using the very same concept of an 'imaginal world' becomes contentious. This raises the question: can we discern the influence of Suhrawardī on Ibn 'Arabī concerning this idea? To answer this, I collect and analyze evidence from Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators in this article, and focus on the terminologies and argumentations

5. Corbin, H., *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran*. Translated by N. Pearson, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977, p. xxvii.

6. Nasr, S.H., *Three Muslim Sages*. Delmar: Caravan Books, 1976, pp.100–2; Rosenthal, F., 'Ibn 'Arabī between "Philosophy" and "Mysticism:" "Sūfism and Philosophy Are Neighbors and Visit Each Other." *fa-inna at-taṣawwuf wa-t-tafalsuf yatajāwarāni wa-yatazāwarāni*.' In *Oriens*, 31 (1988), pp.1–35. Chittick, W.C. 'Ibn 'Arabī.' In *History of Islamic Philosophy*. Edited by S.H. Nasr and O. Leaman, 2 vols., London: Routledge, 1996, vol. 1, pp.497–509.

7. Addas, C., *Ibn 'Arabī ou La quête du Soufre Rouge*, Paris: Gallimard, 1989, p. 139. Addas, C., *Quest for the Red Sulphur*. Translated by P. Kingsley, Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1993, pp. 109–10.

used by them in order to measure similarity and difference. As I shall show, my answer is that influence cannot be proven and that we should consider the possibility for the term to be a homonym. This is no trifling matter as the idea is recognized as one of the most innovative developments of Islamic philosophy and is unique in comparison to other philosophical traditions.⁸ Furthermore, both Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī are said to have had a lasting and pervasive impact on Islamic culture, and their respective ideas of a world of image are likely part of this impact.⁹

After summarizing the idea associated with the term ‘world of image’ within the discourse of Suhrawardī and his commentators, I discuss relevant terminology and argumentation in Ibn ‘Arabī’s two major texts, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* and *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. This will show that to argue for a Suhrawardian influence requires interpreting certain passages very favorably, while ignoring the philosophical context in which Ibn ‘Arabī makes these remarks. I then do the same for Ibn ‘Arabī’s most important early commentators, additionally pointing out that this issue was still further developed from commentator to commentator. I end with examples of how the two discourses perceived each other, namely, as largely in agreement on certain issues yet fundamentally different.

8. It is entirely different from the neoplatonic ‘astral body’ as described by Proclus, cf. Dodds, E.R., ‘The Astral Body in Neoplatonism.’ In *The Elements of Theology*. Proclus, translated by E.R. Dodds, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, pp.313–21. Corbin sought for it, in vain, in Zoroastrianism but had more success in comparing it with Emmanuel Swedenborg’s thought, see Corbin, *Terre céleste et corps de résurrection*, pp.31–81; Corbin, ‘Mundus Imaginalis ou l’imaginaire et l’imaginal,’ p.13.

9 Ahmed, S., *What is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015. Compare e.g. Knysh, A.D., *Ibn ‘Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*. Albany: SUNY Press, 1999; El-Rouayheb, K., *Islamic Intellectual History in the Seventeenth Century: Scholarly Currents in the Ottoman Empire and the Maghreb*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, pp.235–346.

THE WORLD OF IMAGE ACCORDING TO SUHRAWARDĪ AND HIS COMMENTATORS

What later became the world of image started as a proposal about how common people (neither vile criminals nor fully-fledged philosophers) could enjoy some type of felicity after death by employing their imagination. This idea was introduced by Ibn Sīnā, as up until his time the soteriology current among philosophers knew only a twofold division: those who received eternal bliss and those who received eternal misery. Eternal bliss was defined as being a world elevated from change and multiplicity, containing the form of the cosmos, existing without matter, that is, coming to be on the level of the intelligible world.¹⁰ Misery after death was understood to be an aching for something that was no longer there: the body and its sensory perception. Ibn Sīnā broke open this dichotomy by considering the imagination as an intermediate form of perception between sense perception and intellection. Since perception was through the organ's reception of a form, and since reception of a particular thing required a particular, divisible receptor, organs for particular perception were bodily. Since the imagination captured things in their particular shape and form, it was a bodily faculty. But since the soul, after death, had just departed from its body, it required another body to use its imagination. Any body in the sublunar world would imply metempsychosis (*tanāsukh*), a view unanimously rebuked among Islamic intellectuals. Ibn Sīnā came to suggest that people can make use of celestial bodies to activate their imagination after death. He further suggested that their imagination would be fueled by the promises of the Quran in accordance with their lives on Earth. People who behaved well (yet had not fully actualized their intellectual capacity) would imagine the

10. To become 'a world' may sound strange, but this seems truly the meaning, cf. Ibn Sīnā, *The Metaphysics of The Healing* [= *Al-Shifā'*]. Translated by M.E. Marmura, Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2005, p. 350; Ibn Sīnā, *Aḥwāl al-nafs: risāla fī al-nafs wa-baqā'ihā wa-ma'ādihā*. Edited by A.F. Ahwani, Cairo: Dār iḥyā' al-kutub al-'arabiyya, 1952, p. 130.

delights of Paradise. People who had misbehaved would imagine the torments of Hellfire, as described in the Quran.

No one after Ibn Sīnā was appreciative of this idea, except Suhrawardī. Studying Ibn Sīnā's soteriology, Suhrawardī came to a division of mankind into four categories. He based this division on permutations of good or bad knowledge and good or bad action. Thus, people ready for the intelligible world had good knowledge and good action. People with bad knowledge and bad action could expect eternal misery. People with only good knowledge or only good action would be candidates to engage with celestial bodies in order to use their imagination, which they could also expect to last forever. An objection to Ibn Sīnā was that it seemed strange for human souls to connect to celestial bodies. These bodies already had souls and one body could not have two souls. Even were it possible to split the body so that both a celestial soul and a human soul could connect with a celestial body, how would this work if the world was eternal and there were therefore an infinite number of souls already separated from their earthly bodies? The solution Suhrawardī came up with depended on his innovations in epistemology. Instead of defining knowledge as the impression of the object onto the faculty of perception, Suhrawardī defined knowledge as the sheer presence of the object before the subject. The thing that actually perceives is the soul, while its faculties are mere conduits. Everything the soul knows must therefore be present to it. This counts first and foremost for itself, and secondly for the body to which it has a special connection. Things outside our body are of a third degree: they first engage with a faculty to establish an image in that faculty. Since that faculty is present to the soul, the image becomes present to the soul and the soul can know it. These images are not impressed onto the faculty but are merely manifested in it. A faculty is therefore not referred to as a *mahall* (place of inherence) but as a *mazhar* (place of manifestation). The images are called 'suspended images' (*muthul mu'allāqa*), to indicate they are, as it were, in suspense, hanging in mid-air. This means they have some form of real existence, and since they are neither bodies, nor souls, nor intelligibles,

Suhrawardī concludes that they must belong to a new, fourth ontological category. As Suhrawardī uses the term 'world' to describe the other categories, so too does he for suspended images. He uses 'the world of suspended images' (*'ālam al-muthul al-mu'allaqa*), 'the world of abstract apparitions' (*'ālam al-ashbāḥ al-mujarrada*), 'another world' (*'ālam ākhar*), a 'magnitudinous world' (*'ālam miqdārī*), and in one place the shorthand 'the imaginable world' (*al-'ālam al-mithālī*). In other ways, too, Suhrawardī speaks of suspended images as a 'world'; for example in describing it as containing 'mountains, seas, lands, amazing sounds and persons,' and in referring to it as 'the eighth clime,' a pun on the ancient division of the inhabited world into seven climes. Yet, for Suhrawardī it is not an independently existing world which we can enter and exit. If we think of the intelligibles, souls, suspended images and bodies as immiscible liquids, then we should not think of them as being stacked on top of each other and strictly separated, but rather as an emulsion, with each category present throughout the volume.

The real architect of the world of image idea (*'ālam al-mithāl*), in its fullest state of development, is Shahrazūrī, the commentator on Suhrawardī. He phases out the role of celestial bodies, as is the use of the adjective 'suspended' (*mu'allaqa*) in favor of the adjective 'imaginable' (*mithālī*). Suhrawardī's terms *'ālam miqdārī* and *al-'ālam al-mithālī* are given centre stage, from which Shahrazūrī derives our term *'ālam al-mithāl*. The role of these images in extraordinary cases is emphasized – as in dreams, divine inspiration, or after death – while the role in ordinary perception is hardly mentioned. Further, no longer are these images said to become manifest in the imagination – for example during meditation – but rather, it is said that humans will enter the world of image, wherein they will take on an image as a body. Thus, paradoxically, instead of needing a place of manifestation (*mazhar*), these images could be places of manifestation in themselves for humans and angels to take on as a body, while they wander about in the world of image. The images are considered self-subsisting and making up a world with a fixed topography, a description of which Shahrazūrī could 'fill many

volumes.¹¹ One aspect that drives this new direction of the idea of suspended images is Shahrazūrī's different teleology. Whereas Suhrawardī considered that all four categories of people would find separate final destinations after death, Shahrazūrī is of the opinion that eventually everybody ought to end up in the proximity of God, as part of the intelligible world. The entire cosmos is structured in a hierarchy, with human souls traversing upwards. For Shahrazūrī, then, suspended images do not in the first place form a different ontological category, but rather a cosmological layer, which human souls traverse after having completed their earthly stages and before they enter the stages of the intelligible world. We can find Shahrazūrī's world of image mentioned in dozens of texts up until our day, with an especially broad acceptance among Shī'ī thinkers.

APPEARANCE OF THE TERM IN IBN 'ARABĪ

When we consider the influence on Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators, we need to keep chronology in mind. Shahrazūrī (d.≥1288/687) lived after Ibn 'Arabī (d.1240/638) and so he could not have been a source for Ibn 'Arabī. Even the prolific commentator Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d.1274/673) was at best Shahrazūrī's contemporary. Therefore, the more mature view of the world of image can only appear in later commentators, or perhaps we should consider that Shahrazūrī was influenced by Ibn 'Arabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī.

In Ibn 'Arabī's corpus I have found the term *'ālam al-mithāl* only twice. Yet, what makes things interesting is that one of those occurrences is in a crucially central place of *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, namely at the very beginning of the first chapter. He relates a story about how he came to write this book: as he circumambulates the Ka'ba he encounters an extraordinary

11. Lit, L.W.C. van, Lange, C.R., 'Constructing a world of its own: A translation of the chapter on the world of image from Shahrazūrī's *Rasā'il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*.' In *Illuminationist Texts and Textual Studies: Essays in Memory of Hussein Ziai*. Edited by A. Gheissari, J. Walbridge and A. Alwishah, Leiden: Brill, 2017, pp. 160–78..

young man who reveals all of it to him. This youth is described as 'the transient youth, both speaking and silent, living and dead, simple and composite, encompassing and encompassed.'¹² 'The transient youth' is a term which is quintessentially Ibn 'Arabī, playing with opposites that somehow seem to go together. In Arabic it reads *al-fatā al-fā'it*, giving the illusion that both words are from the same root letters and are thus harmonious. Yet, on the one hand this man is young and therefore just coming to be, while at the same time he is transient, that is, going out of existence, and therefore old.¹³ I wish to suggest that this goes back to the foundation of Ibn 'Arabī's thinking, of what later became known as the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*: if only God truly exists then it would seem that everything else does not exist. But we see things all around us, indicating that they do exist, and so, crudely put, everything is in a state of both existing and not existing. With the description of this youth, Ibn 'Arabī makes his first steps in preparing his readers for handling such apparent paradoxes.

After stumbling upon this youth, and after reflecting on some verses of poetry on the circumambulation as a prayer being said while walking around a dead person, Ibn 'Arabī relates the following:¹⁴

12. Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. 4 vols. Cairo: Dār al-kutub al-'arabiyya al-kubrā, 1329 [henceforth *al-Futūḥāt* 1329], vol. 1, p. 47; Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*. Edited by A.S. al-Mansub. 7 vols. Cairo: al-Majlis al-a'lā li-1-thaqāfa, 2013 [henceforth *al-Futūḥāt* 2013], vol. 1, p. 198. This Cairo edition is a reprint of the Yemen 2010 edition, as described in Winkel, E. 'Book Review of *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyyah*.' *Journal of Islamic Studies* 24, no. 1 (2013): pp. 80–3.

13. The second word, deriving from *f-w-t*, can also carry the meaning of 'to slip away,' which seems an expedient meaning in this context, arriving at the suggestion that this youth is elusive. Considering the pairs of contradictory terms that follow, and given the relevance of this for Ibn 'Arabī's thinking, I think this elusive character is at best a secondary meaning.

14. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 1, p. 48; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 1, pp. 198–9. Compare Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice*, p. 208; Winkel, E., 'Understanding, and translating, the *Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*.' In *Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn 'Arabi Society*, 55 (2014), pp. 1–32; Meier, F., 'Das Mysterium der Ka'ba.' In *Die Mysterien*. Edited by O. Fröbe-Kapteyn, Eranos Jahrbuch

I said: when these verses came to me, and I approached His blessed house, from a direction close to the dead, he grabbed me forcefully and spoke in a deterring manner, admonishing: 'look to the inner part [lit. secret] of the house before it is too late. You will find it flourishing¹⁵ because of those who encircle it and circumambulate its stones, looking at them from behind its veils and its drapes.' So I saw it flourishing as he had said. Then I addressed him in clear speech and I recited for him in the world of image, in an improvised manner.

Therefore, when Ibn 'Arabī describes how he talks back to the youth, he says that he does so in 'the world of image.' No further description is given about what that means and the term itself only appears once later. This is the other passage in which I found it:¹⁶

... and if you ask 'what does *al-sawā*' mean?' We say: the inner depths of the Real in the created thing, and the inner depths of the created thing in the Real. This only happens to someone who knows that he is a place of manifestation for the Real, so that he is at that moment an inner aspect for the Real. And with this *al-fahwāniyya* comes about. If you ask 'what does *al-fahwāniyya* mean?' We say: a face to face conversation with the Real in the world of image. That is what Muhammad, peace and blessing be upon him, said concerning *al-iḥsān*,¹⁷ that you should worship God as though you can see Him.

In this passage, part of the huge Chapter 73, Ibn 'Arabī uses a Socratic style to explain how people can come to a better understanding of God, and their relation to God. The Real, here, is a name for God, whereas the created thing is a designation of the person engaged with God. This is not the place to go into

XI, Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1945, pp. 187–214.

15. Winkel: 'shining,' Corbin and Meier: 'take on life.'

16. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 2, p. 128; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 5, p. 50. Cf. Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Iṣṭilāḥāt al-ṣūfiyya*. Edited by A.R.H. Mahmud, Cairo: 'Ālam al-fikr, 1986, p. 27.

17. This is a reference to the 'Hadith of Gabriel,' in which Muhammad is asked about the meaning of *al-islām*, *al-īmān* and *al-iḥsān*, which translate into practical, intellectual and spiritual aspects of religion.

Ibn 'Arabī's process of drawing near to God, but it seems the fragment translated here describes an advanced stage, in which the connection between the Creator and the created is deeply felt. At that point, something can happen that is akin to an actual conversation between God and the person, which for Ibn 'Arabī happens in what he calls the world of image. Just as before, no further explanation is provided. It is however remarkable how in both cases it is a conversation with a divine being which is specified. Note furthermore that in this second passage the person is spoken of as a 'place of manifestation', *mazhar*, a term we saw used by Suhrawardī. For Suhrawardī, too, conversations with divine beings can happen in the imaginable world. Proof for this is his statement that the conversation he had with Aristotle, in a dream, 'took place in Hurqalya,¹⁸ a mythical city he elsewhere locates 'in the eighth clime,¹⁹ that is, the imaginable world.

The evidence presented so far would seem to support the thesis that Ibn 'Arabī agreed to the ideas put forward by Suhrawardī and expanded on them. While this cannot be ruled out completely, three objections suggest otherwise.

Firstly, we can ask, does Ibn 'Arabī's use of the term *mazhar* mean anything in relation to Suhrawardī? The answer is no. This term is present throughout *al-Futūḥāt* but is coined by Ibn 'Arabī, not to resolve issues in epistemology, but rather ontology. Ibn 'Arabī often makes use of the distinction between God and everything else. He asserts that only God truly exists and everything else derives from it. This is not too far off what, for example, Ibn Sīnā argues in favour of. However, Ibn 'Arabī goes further and claims that everything other than God is a mere reflection of certain aspects of Him,²⁰ and that everything comes

18. Suhrawardī, *al-Mashārī*. In *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica* [= *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques/Majmū'a fī al-ḥikma al-ilāhiyya*]. Edited by H. Corbin, Orig. publ. 1945–1970, 4 vols., Tehran: Institut franco-iranien, 2009, vol. 1, p. 494.

19. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq, Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, p. 254. Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination* [= *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*]. Edited and Translated by J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999, p. 160.

20. Afifi, A.E., *The Mystical Philosophy of Muḥyid Dīn-Ibnul 'Arabī*.

into being as a manifestation of certain aspects of God, and the variety of existents is due to each existent being a manifestation of a slightly different combination of aspects. With God alone existing, according to Ibn 'Arabī's thinking, it is better to speak of 'manifestations' than 'existents' when speaking of anything in the universe. In short, then, it is all but natural for Ibn 'Arabī to refer to entities as places of manifestation,²¹ and no influence from Suhrawardī can be deduced from it.

Secondly, if this influence is true, does Ibn 'Arabī also make use of the term 'suspended images' or a derivative thereof, seeing that this is the central term for Suhrawardī? The answer is again no. I have found only one passage that, if read favorably, could indicate Ibn 'Arabī's knowledge of suspended images. It reads as follows:²²

God makes clear for us [...] that the thing about which we assume that its reality is sensory, is in fact imaginable (*mutakhayyila*). The eye may see it but the case is actually the opposite from what the eye witnesses. This goes for all the bodily and spiritual faculties. Thus, the world in its entirety consists of forms, erected images (*muthul maṣṣūba*). Its existential state is therefore the state of imagination, and from there you divide the forms that you see into sensory and imaginable. But everything is imaginable (*wal-kull mutakhayyil*). This is only said by those who experience this stage (*mashhad*), and so the philosopher tosses it aside and all the people of intellectual arguments toss it aside. The people of outward interpretation do not speak of it, indeed, not even of the notions that provide them with these forms. The only ones who come close to this stage are the Sophists, except that the

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939, p.16. Cf. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 3, p. 398; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 9, p. 261.

21. Chittick, W.C., *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989, p. 16. See, for example, Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 1, p. 694; vol. 2, pp. 33, 99, 102, 167; vol. 3, p. 11; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 4, pp. 84–5, vol. 4, p. 352, pp. 541–2, p. 551, vol. 5, p. 164, vol. 7, p. 367.

22. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 3, p. 525. This passage should be at the beginning of volume 10 of the 2013 edition. However, the Cairo reprint that I am using has only been published up to volume 9 so I cannot give an exact reference.

difference between us and them is that they say that all of this has no reality to it, while we do not say that. Rather, we say that it is real. Therefore, we deviated from all the factions, but God and His messenger agree with us over what we know about what is behind what we witnessed.

I have translated a bit more than is necessary, as the context of this passage provides insightful material about the ideas we are dealing with in this article. The most important point, however, is the inclusion of a term called *muthul maṣṣūba*, which is somehow reminiscent of Suhrawardī's *muthul mu'allaqa*, given the combination of *muthul* with a passive participle, and also given the topical context. I have translated *maṣṣūba* as 'erected,' although its exact meaning in this context eludes me. The word derives from the stem *n-ṣ-b*, meaning 'to erect, prepare, plant, appoint, or display.' Ibn 'Arabī uses the term elsewhere too, such as in *mir'āt maṣṣūba*, 'erected mirror,'²³ and twice he uses *khayāl maṣṣūb*, 'erected imagination.'²⁴ Perhaps the term is to be understood as in the following sentence:²⁵

In every moment of unveiling to which the Real elevates you, there is a thing from the world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*) which He erects (*yaṣṣubuḥu*) for you, similar to your state in which you are at that moment.

If we are right in using this sentence to interpret the word *maṣṣūba*, then what is conveyed is that image becomes not just any image but one specifically made for that person in that situation.²⁶ It would not mean 'erected' in a sense such as 'independently existing,' which would be closer to how Suhrawardī uses his term *mu'allaqa*, 'that is, not in a place or locus.'²⁷ Besides,

23. Ibid. 1329, vol. 3, p. 398; ibid. 2013, vol. 9, p. 261.

24. Ibid. 1329, vol. 1, p. 116, vol. 2, p. 311; ibid. 2013, vol. 1, p. 385, vol. 5, p. 572.

25. Ibid. 1329, vol. 1, p. 158; ibid. 2013, vol. 1, p. 488.

26. Perhaps Ibn 'Arabī also means to allude to 'graven images' in reference to pre-Islamic idols or altar blocks called *aṣṣāb*, sing. *nuṣub* (cf. Fahd, T., 'Nuṣub,' *El2*, vol. 8, pp. 154b–55b). I thank Stephen Hirtenstein for this suggestion.

27. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2,

this passage claims that everything in the cosmos is such an image, which is far from what Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī claim. Therefore, not even this passage can serve as irrefutable evidence for Suhrawardī's influence on Ibn 'Arabī. Beyond this, we may notice in this passage a succinct statement from Ibn 'Arabī about the paradoxical status of things being existent and non-existent; they do exist, but their ontological status is one belonging to imagination. As Ibn 'Arabī says in *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 'This is the meaning of imagination: that it is imaginable to you that something is an additional matter, capable of existing on its own, outside of the Real, while this is not the case in reality.'²⁸ Only those who have understood this through immediate experience will fully grasp the meaning of that and will agree to it, says Ibn 'Arabī. Perhaps he means an experience as mentioned above, a face-to-face conversation with a divine entity. He is clearly not bashful about suggesting that he himself had such an experience – perhaps we can recall his encounter with the youth.

Lastly, if Ibn 'Arabī derived the term *'ālam al-mithāl* as a technical term from Suhrawardī, why did he only use it twice and never again? I think the only satisfying answer is that this is because the term *'ālam al-mithāl* is best seen as an alternative for a much more frequently used term, *'ālam al-khayāl*, 'the world of imagination.' The apparent interchangeability of *mithāl maṣṣūb* and *khayāl maṣṣūb* above, is already an indicator for this. The ease with which later commentators used the terms as synonyms is another piece of evidence for it. Seen from this perspective, and in the light of the previously translated passages, I think we can conclude that Ibn 'Arabī came to this term from an angle entirely different from that of Suhrawardī. For Ibn 'Arabī, everything belongs principally to 'imagination,' and it is as such the existential state of imagination which provides a bridging function between what he calls, referencing the Quran, 'the world of the unseen' (*'ālam al-ghayb*) and 'the

p.212. Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p.138.

28. Ibn 'Arabī, Muḥyī al-Dīn, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by N.A. al-Lakḥnawī, Beirut: Klaus Schwarz, 2013, pp.140–1. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by A.A. 'Afīfī, Beirut: Dār al-kitāb al-'arabī, 2002, p.103.

world of what is visible' (*'ālam al-shahāda*) – notions that are absent from Suhrawardī's thinking. For example:²⁹

We say, the world [in which something is in] can be of two different worlds, and the state [in which something is in] can be one of two different states, although there might be considered a third state between them, generated from their combination. The first state is the state of the unseen, to which belongs a world called the world of the unseen. The second state is the state of sense perception and what is visible, and its world is called the world of what is visible. Comprehending this world is by eyesight (*al-baṣar*), and comprehending the world of the unseen is by insight (*al-baṣīra*). The thing generated from their combination is a state and a world. The state is the state of imagination, and the world is the world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*). In it, ideas become visible through sensory shapes, such as knowledge in the form of milk.³⁰

The world of imagination thus comes about by combining the two existential states, being both and neither. This is vastly different from how even Shahrzūrī proposes the world of image to be. In one telling passage, Ibn 'Arabī strings a couple of notions together in a manner incompatible with Suhrawardī's thinking:³¹

If you ask 'what is the world of the isthmus?' (*'ālam al-barzakh*), we say 'the world of imagination' (*'ālam al-khayāl*), and some people of the Way (*ahl al-ṭarīq*) call it the World of Might (*'ālam al-jabarūt*).

If *'ālam al-khayāl* is supposed to come from Suhrawardī's *'ālam al-muthul al-mu'allaqa*, then Ibn 'Arabī is making two claims that do not cohere with Suhrawardī's thought. Suhrawardī does not speak of 'isthmus,' *barzakh*, as a realm because the world itself is an isthmus, but because he uses isthmus as an alternative word

29. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 3, p. 42; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 7, p. 455.

30. Cf. Ibn 'Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. al-Lakhnawī, p. 132; ed. Afīfī, p. 100.

31. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 2, p. 129; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 5, p. 52.

for body.³² Further, the term *al-jabarūt* is used by Suhrawardī for the world of intelligibles, not the imagination.³³

A last passage that is interesting to discuss is the following:³⁴

God only made sleep for the animal world so that everyone might witness the state of imagination and know that there is another world (*'ālam ākhar*) similar to the sensory world.

This is a statement remarkably similar to Suhrawardī's comment in *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*:³⁵

Whoever sees that place is certain of the existence of another world (*'ālam ākhar*) different from the [world of] bodies, in which are suspended images.

Both authors refer here to the imaginable world as 'another world,' both emphasize its relationship to the earthly world, and both point to individual experience as a supreme way of knowing about it. On top of that, we may add that Suhrawardī, too, thinks that sleep is a good way for this experience. It is difficult to argue against this evidence, except for pointing out that no specific technical terms were used, which would have been irrefutable evidence for influence. Rather, we are seeing here how two independent systems of thinking argue for notions that are very close in their place and function, and therefore use similar language to express those notions, yet with distinct genealogies.

APPEARANCE OF THE TERM IN IBN 'ARABĪ'S COMMENTATORS

As Ibn 'Arabī lived before Shahrazūrī, the latter could not have influenced Ibn 'Arabī. Since Shahrazūrī contributed significantly to the notion of a world of image, it will be interesting to go

32. Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p.195.

33. Suhrawardī, *Risāla fī i'tiqād al-ḥukamā'*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, p.270

34. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 3, p.198; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 8, p.298; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p.119.

35. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, pp.242–3; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p.155.

through some of the early commentators on Ibn 'Arabī to see if any influence of Shahrazūrī took hold on them. Here I shall consider Ibn 'Arabī's principle student, Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī (d.1274/673), Qūnawī's students 'Afīf al-Dīn Tilimsānī (d.1291/690), Sa'īd al-Dīn Farghānī (d.1299/699), and Mu'ayyad al-Dīn Jandī (d.1300/700), the student of Jandī, 'Abd al-Razzāq Kāshānī (d.1329/730), and the student of Kāshānī, Dāwūd Qayṣarī (d.1350/751). The first three are practically contemporaries of Shahrazūrī, and the others come within only one hundred years of him. In general, we may notice a tendency among these commentators of Ibn 'Arabī to assume the term *'ālam al-mithāl* as a proper technical term, although still subject to a process of redefinition. The adjective *manṣūba*, used by Ibn 'Arabī as a technical term although little explained, is not used by later authors. Other terms pertinent to Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī are, with few exceptions, not present. Although we cannot rule out influence from Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī, it seems unlikely.

Qūnawī discusses the world of image and imagination in several places.³⁶ These places show overlap in content and wording, attesting to a clear vision on the topic. We find a more articulate reason of how the world of image is an isthmus. He writes:³⁷

All bodies are composite and spirits are simple, so there is no correspondence between them and therefore no contact (*irtibāt*). Whatever does not have contact cannot bring forth influence nor being influenced, and no giving nor taking. Therefore, God created the world of image as a uniting isthmus, between the world of spirits and the world of bodies, to make possible a connection of one of the two worlds with the other.

36. Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Sharḥ al-Arba'īn ḥadīthan*, pp.32, 66, 106, 110, 129–30, 133, 136, 142–7 and 181. Edited by H.K. Yilmaz, Qom: Bīdār, 1372; Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *al-Fukūk*, pp.205–8, 226–34, 255 and 273. Edited by M. Khojavi, Tehran: Mawlā, 1371; Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, Fanārī, Shams al-Dīn, *Miftāḥ al-ghayb wa-sharḥuhu miṣbāḥ al-uns*. Edited by M. Khojavi, Tehran: Intishārāt Mawlā, 1416, p.106. Qūnawī, Ṣadr al-Dīn, *Al-Nafaḥāt Al-Ilāhiyya*. Edited by M. Khojavi, Tehran: Intishārāt Mawlā, 1417, pp.80, 119, 165, 175.

37. Qūnawī, *Sharḥ al-Arba'īn ḥadīthan*, p.143.

The terms 'composite' and 'simple' are shortened forms here, to refer to all the ways in which bodies and spirits are completely different from each other. It is as though the two worlds speak different languages. The world of image is therefore needed as an interpreter.

A central passage discussing the nature of the world of imagination is the following:³⁸

The world of imagination (*'ālam al-khayāl*) has two degrees and two names: a dependent degree, which is specific to a human being and to every act of imagination. In its sense of dependence it is called 'imagination' (*khayāl*). The impression on it of ideas and spirits might correspond [to the actual thing] and it might not, to the extent of the health or impairment of the brain, the irregularity or equilibrium of the humoral temperament, and the strength or weakness of the capacity to imagine. This world in its unrestricted degree is called the world of image (*'ālam al-mithāl*). Everything that is taking shape in it (*yatajassadu*) undoubtedly corresponds [to the actual thing].

In this passage, Qūnawī is establishing the term *'ālam al-mithāl* as a technical term which is no longer exactly synonymous to the term *'ālam al-khayāl*. The latter is more general and covers two aspects: the world of image and the human imagination. One big difference between these two is the veracity of its objects, which is undoubtedly for the world of image, but does not hold true when we speak of the human imagination. How the two are related is expressed in another sentence:³⁹

The relation of human, restricted imaginations to the world of image is like the relation of creeks to a mighty river from which they branch out and with which they connect with one end.

Qūnawī here suggests that the human imagination is an extension of the world of image. For Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī, as we recall, the world of image and the human imagination are not as similar as the connection expressed here. Qūnawī also

38. Qūnawī, *al-Fukūk*, pp.205–6.

39. *Ibid.* p.206.

suggests that this connection can be traversed upwards, even beyond the world of image:⁴⁰

I have seen [this world] and I entered it myself, in one of its places of manifestation, from the restricted imagination to the world of image, through the door of connection that has been pointed out. And I reached its end and exited from it to the world of spirits, and then to the vast plain of the sources of light. Praise be to God for what He bestows.

At first, this passage seems tantalizingly compatible with Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī. Suhrawardī upheld personal experience as the premier way of knowing of suspended images, which Qūnawī discusses here. For Shahrazūrī a place of manifestation is an acceptable way of thinking of the images in the world of image. The order of the cosmos into sensory world, imaginable world and intelligible world is again something Shahrazūrī would not object to. And lastly, the reference to light would be well received by Suhrawardī. However, the suggestion that one could go through all these worlds in a single experience is foreign to both Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī. This reveals that the mechanics behind the cosmology of Qūnawī are different from the one behind the cosmology of Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī.

This difference is also visible in the ontological division found in Kāshānī's commentary, who lists: (1) the state of the essence [of God] (*ḥaḍrat al-dhāt*), (2) the state of the attributes and names [of God], (3) the state of the acts [of God], (4) the state of the image and imagination, and (5) the state of sense perception and observation.⁴¹ This list, defined using aspects of God, is utterly foreign to Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī, who would rather propose a division into: (1) intellects, (2) souls, (3) suspended images, and (4) physical bodies.⁴² As such, Ibn

40. Ibid. p.207.

41. Kāshānī, 'Abd al-Razzāq, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by M. Hadi Zadeh, Tehran: Anjuman-i asār va mufākhir-i farhangī, 2004, p.246.

42. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, p.232; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p.149.

‘Arabī and his commentators give an entirely different proposition for the place and rank of both the human imagination and the world of imagination.

Before we continue to discuss Kāshānī, I wish to point out that other early commentators on Ibn ‘Arabī do not contribute much to the discussion on the world of image. Tilimsānī does not use the term *‘ālam al-mithāl* in his commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*, and only makes very little use of the term *‘ālam al-khayāl*.⁴³ Farghānī acknowledges the existence of an *‘ālam al-mithāl* but merely uses it as a technical term that is not central to his exposition.⁴⁴ Jandī, a major early commentator, also makes markedly less use of the notion; when he does, he does not expand on it, but merely uses it as a technical term.⁴⁵ From the usage of the term *irtibāṭ* we can infer he took his interpretation from Qūnawī.⁴⁶

Kāshānī, then, uses the term frequently,⁴⁷ and expands on Qūnawī’s redefinition. The following passage is clearly a rewrite of the two passages from Qūnawī translated above:⁴⁸

The imagination of a person is the dependent world of image (*‘ālam al-mithāl al-muqayyad*), just as the world of image is the absolute imagination (*al-khayāl al-muṭlaq*), i.e. the imagination of the world. The human imagination is faced towards the world of image – because it derives from it and has a connection with it – and is [also] faced towards the soul and the body.

Here the world of image and the human imagination are further brought into relationship with each other, by switching the nouns and adjectives used for both. Normally, the world of

43. Tilimsānī, ‘Afīf al-Dīn, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by A. Rashidiniya, Tehran: Intishārāt sakhan, 2013, pp.189–96, 326.

44. Farghānī, Sa‘īd al-Dīn, *Muntahā al-madārik*. Edited by W. al-Khatawī, Qom: Kitābsarā-i ishrāq, 1386, pp.135, 323.

45. Jandī, Mu‘ayyad al-Dīn, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by S.J.D. Ashtiyani, Qom: Bustan-e ketāb-e Qom, 2002, pp.32, 243, 393 and 422.

46. Ibid. p.392.

47. Kāshānī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, pp.128, 137, 209, 245, 246, 401, 411, 467, 501, 540, 543, 544 and 549.

48. Ibid. p.203.

image is said to be *muṭlaq* (absolute) because it is an independent ontological and cosmological notion. The human imagination is said to be *muqayyad*, as it is restricted for the person and dependent on the strength and health of that person (as Qūnawī points out). Here, Kāshānī suggests that the world of image is very similar to the human imagination, so that we can call the world of image an absolute kind of human imagination, and we can call the human imagination a dependent kind of world of image. It merits repeating that this strengthening of the bond between the two, and the use of the terms *khayāl*, *muṭlaq* and *muqayyad*, makes this passage decidedly part of the discourse born of Ibn 'Arabī's writings, not Suhrawardī's. The last part of the passage is a rewriting of Qūnawī's simile of rivers and creeks. Kāshānī chooses to emphasize the connection of imagination with the person, and speaks of it as having two ends, two faces; one directed at the world of image, the other at the person.

One aspect of Kāshānī's commentary strikes me as remarkably close to Suhrawardī's thinking on suspended images: namely, that images in mirrors are suspended images as they cannot possibly inhere in the mirror itself. This suggestion can perhaps be found in Ibn 'Arabī and Qūnawī too, but neither of them wrote it down as clearly as Kāshānī:⁴⁹

What is visible in the mirror is an imagination, as it has no reality outside of the mirror and no existence of itself and therefore [must] be an imaginable image (*mithāl mukhayyal*).

Images in mirrors must have a special kind of existence, as Kāshānī suggests, and with this he intuits something that Suhrawardī had also considered. However, speaking of the same problem is not evidence in itself, nor does it even suggest a somewhat similar solution. Suhrawardī gives specific arguments to rule out other options, and none resembles in word or idea what Kāshānī writes. Thus, we only have a frustratingly vague correspondence between the two thinkers, with no confirmation that Kāshānī was influenced by Suhrawardī or Shahrāzūrī. It does show that the concept of imagination as developed by

49. Ibid. p. 259.

Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators has similar functions to the concept developed by Suhrawardī and his commentators.

The last person relevant to the discussion is Dāwūd Qayṣarī, who uses the notion of a world of image frequently.⁵⁰ He even dedicates a special chapter to the world of image in the introduction of his *Sharḥ al-Fuṣūṣ*. Interestingly, Qayṣarī prefers 'the imaginable world,' *al-‘ālam al-mithālī*, over 'the world of image,' *‘ālam al-mithāl*. The difference is small but meaningful in this context, as Suhrawardī coined this first term and never used the second, and Shahrazūrī used both terms extensively, deriving the second from the first. The first few sentences of Qayṣarī's chapter are a succinct statement on what the world of image is:⁵¹

Know that the imaginable world is a spiritual world of a luminous substance. It resembles bodily substance in being sensory and magnitudinous, and resembles abstract, intelligible substance in being luminous. It is neither a body with a material composition, nor an intelligible, abstract substance, because it is an isthmus and a dividing boundary between them. Anything that is an isthmus between two things is certainly different from both, with only two aspects of which each resembles that which is appropriate for its world.

This passage is best discussed when compared with Shahrazūrī's. If we take a central passage from Shahrazūrī and reduce it in places – indicated by the ellipses – we notice that the two passages are fairly similar:⁵²

If you hear of the discussion of the ancients that there is a magnitudinous world in existence, which is not the sensory world nor the intelligible, [...] believe in it and let your faith in it not be

50. Qayṣarī, Dāwūd, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*. Edited by H. Hasan Zade Amoli, 2 vols., Qom: Bustan-e ketab-e Qom, 2003, pp.85, 92, 111, 127, 222, 259, 567, 579, 582, 588, 670, 921, 964, 982, 1108, 1172 and 1193.

51. Ibid. p.117. Qayṣarī, Dāwūd, *Foundations of Islamic Mysticism: Qayṣarī's Introduction to Ibn 'Arabī's Fuṣūṣ Al-Ḥikam*. Translated by M.H. Ali, Spiritual Alchemy Press, 2012, p.131.

52. Shahrazūrī, Shams al-Dīn, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-ishraq*. Edited by H. Ziai. Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 2001, p.554.

hard on you, as the prophets and the divine sages recognize this world. [...] The imaginable world is parallel to the ever-moving sensory world. As the elements are constantly receptive of what is appropriate from the spheres and stars, so the spheres and the stars of the world of image are [also] constantly in motion.

What is strikingly similar is the use of the terms 'magnitudinous,' *miqdāriyyan*, and 'the imaginable world,' *al-'ālam al-mithālī*, and the assertion that it is neither part of the intelligible, abstract world nor of the sensory, bodily world. The first similarity is remarkable, as this is an unusual word and to be using it in the exact same way without the two philosophers knowing of each other seems unlikely. Where the two depart is in the second part of their passages. Qayṣarī frames the world of image in terms of an isthmus. Where previous commentators described the human imagination as having two sides – one connecting with a person and the other connecting with the world of image – here Qayṣarī applies that thought to the world of image itself, making it connect the spiritual and the bodily world in general. Shahrazūrī, on the other hand, only asserts the sameness of the world of image with the earthly world. We can think here of the term 'the eighth clime,' *al-iqlīm al-thāmin*, used by Suhrawardī and Shahrazūrī, which frames this world of image squarely as an immaterial, bodily realm.

The way Qayṣarī envisions the relationship between the world of image and the human imagination is best illustrated by the following passage:⁵³

Restricted images, which are imaginations too, are nothing but a sample and a shadow of it, created by God as an indication for the existence of the spiritual world. Because of this, the masters of unveiling consider it to be connected with this world and derive enlightenment from it, like creeks and rivers connect to the sea, and apertures and windows through which light enters in a house.

We see here a throwback to Ibn 'Arabī's statement that sleep was only created as an indication of the world of image.

53. Qayṣarī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p.120; *Foundations of Islamic Mysticism*, p.135.

Qayṣarī slightly altered it, to suggest any act of the imagination can invoke this indication. He further points out the relevance of personal experience, a theme we have seen occur in both Suhrawardī and Ibn ‘Arabī. Lastly, we see the simile of the creeks and river change yet again. Qayṣarī groups them together and contrasts them with a sea, perhaps to indicate a vast, static realm rather than a moving, elongated realm. This passage is also typical for the developments Qayṣarī introduces, deliberately bringing his own text in conversation with earlier commentaries.

MENTIONS BACK AND FORTH

To round out the above discussion, I wish to highlight the impression that both commentary traditions had of each other. I will only use two examples here, one from each discourse.

The first is from Shahrazūrī’s chapter on the world of image in his *Rasā’il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya*. Near the end, he relates the following:⁵⁴

One of the shaykhs from among those who affirm the existence of the world of image says: the imagination is a portion of the world of image from which it flows, like a distributary from a great river. He calls it ‘the attached imagination’ (*al-khayāl al-muttaṣil*), and he calls the world of image ‘the detached imagination’ (*al-khayāl al-munfaṣil*).⁵⁵

54. Shahrazūrī, Shams al-Dīn, *Rasā’il al-shajara al-ilāhiyya fī ‘ulūm al-ḥaqā’iq al-rabbāniyya*. Edited by N. Habibi. 3 vols. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy, 2005, vol. 3, pp. 465–6.

55. I follow Akkach’s translations of these terms, as I find Chittick’s ‘contiguous/discontiguous’ to be implying that the human imagination is still independent, merely being contiguous to the human soul rather than an integral part of it. Afifi’s ‘inseparable/separable’ is too passive, as though we could do the separation mentally but does not exist in reality. Corbin’s ‘inséparable/autonome’ also works but it seemed appropriate to use words from the same root. Cf. Akkach, S., ‘The World of Imagination in Ibn ‘Arabī’s Ontology.’ In *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 14:1 (1997), pp. 102–3; Chittick, *The Sufi Path*, p. 117; Afifi, *Mystical Philosophy*, p. 130; Corbin, *L’imagination créatrice*, pp. 163–4.

Clearly, then, Shahrazūrī was aware of the remarkable semblance between the concept of the world of imagination of Ibn 'Arabī and the world of image of Suhrawardī. Shahrazūrī's passing remark here shows he had working knowledge of the concept as it was described by Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators. However, two aspects indicate that he did not equate one with the other. Firstly, he only mentions the concepts of Ibn 'Arabī in these couple of sentences and by that, he shows that he only wishes to use them as an example. Secondly, he does not call anybody by name but instead uses the term 'shaykhs,' thereby indicating that he is speaking of the Sufis. He thus distances himself, as part of the commentators on Suhrawardī, from Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators. This becomes clearer in another text, by Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d.1310/710). This text is an epistle, written in response to a question, in which Shīrāzī makes heavy use of this chapter from Shahrazūrī. In it, Shīrāzī first announces that 'among what points to the existence of this world, I mean the world of image, is the testimony of the prophets, the saints (*al-awliyā'*), and the divine sages among the philosophers.'⁵⁶ He then gives examples of a statement of a prophet, and then of a saint, and this time he mentions Ibn 'Arabī by name. In fact, he provides some citations from *al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya* as evidence. This in itself should be unsurprising, as Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī was a student of Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī. The important thing to note here is not that Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī asserts that the two thinkers – Suhrawardī and Ibn 'Arabī – argue for the same thing, but rather that he distances Ibn 'Arabī and his followers from Suhrawardī and his followers, mentioning them only to show that the mystics agree with this philosophical idea.

Just as the commentators of Suhrawardī distance themselves from 'the mystics', so the commentators of Ibn 'Arabī distance themselves from 'the philosophers'. In the commentary by Kāshānī we come across the mention of a group of people called *al-Ishrāqiyyūn*, that is, 'those who follow Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*.' Kāshānī makes use of it to say that what is known

56. Walbridge, J. *The Science of Mystic Lights*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, p. 244.

to readers of Ibn ‘Arabī as ‘abstract, divine spirits’ (*al-arwāḥ al-mujarrada al-malakūtiyya*) is known to the Ishraqis as a ‘dominating light’ (*al-nūr al-qāhīr*).⁵⁷ He summarizes how this is taught in *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, showing a working knowledge of it. At one point, he seems to switch around the word *al-Ishrāqiyyūn* for *al-falāsifa*, showing that he considers Suhrawardī and his followers to be philosophers (in the classical sense), not mystics. This is confirmed in the last sentence, where he says:

The ecstasy and direct experience (*dhawq*) of the Shaykh agrees with the teaching (*madhhab*) of the Ishraqis.

Even though Kāshānī speaks of agreement, the way this sentence is constructed implies that he wishes to distance Suhrawardī and his commentators from himself – he himself being part of the group of Ibn ‘Arabī and his commentators. He does this by implying that Suhrawardī is a philosopher and therefore adheres to rational argumentation,⁵⁸ while Ibn ‘Arabī is a mystic and therefore adheres to spiritual experience. The two happen to agree on the point mentioned above, but have arrived at it by different means.

CONCLUSION

We have been looking at passages in which Ibn ‘Arabī and his commentators used terms or arguments that resemble those from Suhrawardī and his commentators, concerning the world of image. I argued that the term ‘*ālam al-mithāl*’ is a homonym. I used this qualification to emphasize the necessity to distinguish between how the two discourses understand this term. From our discussion it should, however, also be clear that the term ‘the world of image’ is not as much of a homonym as for example the word ‘duck’ is – which is the name of a bird and

57. Kāshānī, *Sharḥ Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, p. 369.

58. The fact that Suhrawardī himself claims that spiritual experience should be taken seriously does not detract from this. Cf. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, pp. 9–12; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, pp. 1–3.

also a verb – the two being absolutely unrelated in any way. In the case of the world of image, both discourses for example associate it with the faculty of imagination, resulting in some overlap in meaning. In fact, although my final conclusion is that resemblance does not mean they are exactly the same, at times it may have looked like I was actually arguing that they are the same. In those cases, I have deconstructed and contextualized this resemblance to show that underneath this resemblance there are crucial differences between the two discourses. In general, it also merits mentioning that the above passages are not examples of many other such passages; it is *only* these passages that could show an influence from one discourse to another. As Rosenthal remarks concerning the *Liber de causis* and the *Theology of Aristotle* as sources for Ibn 'Arabī, 'He may very well have read those works, [...] but unless he indicates that much, proof that he did would require unambiguous identification of accurate quotations.'⁵⁹ The remark is just as pertinent in this case, given that we have not seen any unambiguous, accurate and supporting quotations in this article. Besides Rosenthal I would add that, so as to maintain a similarity between the two discourses, it might well come at the cost of retaining an exact understanding of what the two different authors are trying to convey, resulting in a denial of originality and disagreement.

I suggest that the terms *al-iqlīm al-thāmin* and *al-barzakh* best typify the difference in the meaning and usage of the term 'world of image,' between Suhrawardī and his commentators and Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators. The first is created from a 'bottom-up' perspective, as an extension of the bodily realm without the unwanted consequences of materiality, born out of a fusion of discussions on eschatology and epistemology. The second is created from a 'top-down' perspective, used to hold together the cosmos and its many different things, born out of discussions of ontology. With the first term, it is argued that this world is neither sensory nor intelligible; with the second term it is proposed that it has aspects of both. The two discourses are

59. Rosenthal, 'Ibn 'Arabī between "Philosophy" and "Mysticism",' pp.18–9.

therefore radically different, and use other terms such as *mazhar* (place of manifestation) in entirely different ways. Furthermore, we have seen that within both discourses there is again difference in meaning. Shahrazūrī's world of image is much more independent and extraordinary than Suhrawardī's. The relationship between the human imagination and the world of image is constantly renegotiated among Ibn 'Arabī's commentators. This is not the place to go into that deeply, and considerably more textual evidence would have to be brought forward to truly sketch out the development of such a discussion.⁶⁰

Lastly, I have argued that it is plausible that both groups of thinkers were aware of the use of the term *'ālam al-mithāl* by the other group, and both acknowledged their differences and similarities in its usage. Both sides seemed content to characterize Suhrawardī and his commentators as philosophers, and Ibn 'Arabī and his commentators as mystics, thus establishing a distance between each other. At the same time, in the words of Suhrawardī, both discourses agreed about 'the existence of another world different from the [world of] bodies,'⁶¹ or, as Ibn 'Arabī would have it, 'that there is another world similar to the sensory world.'⁶²

60. For Suhrawardī and his commentators, see Lit, L.W.C. van, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrazūrī, and Beyond*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.

61. Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In *Œuvres philosophiques...*, vol. 2, pp. 242–3; *The Philosophy of Illumination*, p. 155.

62. Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt* 1329, vol. 3, p. 198; *al-Futūḥāt* 2013, vol. 8, p. 298.