**An Account of Suhrawardī’s Allegories in light of the Illuminationist Philosophy**

**Abstract**

In this paper, I seek to explain Suhrawardī’s method of writing his allegories—how he draws upon his philosophical principles to construct forms and plots of his stories. To do so, I begin by delineating two key doctrines of his Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) ontology: the world of Forms (*‘ālam al-muthul*) and the discontinuous imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl al-munfaṣil*). I provide an account of the history of these two doctrines and the nature of these two worlds, and then consider some of their functions for, and effects on, Suhrawardī’s explanations and analyses. I will then deal with Suhrawardī’s allegories, pinpointing particular effects of the belief in the world of Forms and the imaginal world on his symbolisms and allegories. Distinguishing three main spiritual-mystical notions in Suhrawardī’s allegories, I elaborate upon the role of the above two doctrines in his construction of characters and fictional events, whereby I demystify certain symbols in these stories. I conclude that there is a close tie between Suhrawardī’s allegories and his philosophical doctrines. Thus, his spiritual doctrines are presented in a symbolic form in certain allegorical characters and adventures. The deployment of characteristics of the world of Forms and the imaginal world plays a central role here.

**Keywords:** Suhrawardī, Lords of the types (or species) (*arbāb al-anwā‘*), world of Forms (*‘ālam al-muthul*), imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl*), allegory.

**Introduction**

Suhrawardī established his Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) philosophical school, after Fārābī and Avicenna—the founders of the Islamic Peripatetic philosophy—and before Mullā Ṣadrā who was going to establish the presently predominant framework of Islamic philosophy—the so-called “Transcendent Wisdom.” Having generally and starkly rejected the Peripatetic philosophy, Suhrawardī deployed Platonic, mystical and Khusrawānī (Ancient Persian) theosophical principles to lay the foundations of his own philosophy. In the course of his intellectual and philosophical development, Suhrawardī presented several arguments so as to formulate certain key notions of mystical ontology in terms of philosophical accounts—most significantly, he provided arguments for the existence of the world of lords of the types (or lords of species: *arbāb al-anwā‘*) or Platonic Ideas, as well as another world he referred to as the discontinuous imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl al-munfaṣil*).

Recognizing these two worlds and their ontological place had wide-ranging effects on accounts provided for many issues and phenomena in Illuminationist ontology and psychology, and to a great extent, the effect remained in force among philosophers after Suhrawardī. One case in point is that of arts, manners of imaginations, and representations by Illuminationist artists, as well as theories of art that proposed a specific framework for forms and styles of artworks. Apparently aware of the potential expansion of his philosophy to the world of art, Suhrawardī wrote stories with contexts, adventures, and characters inspired by the world of Forms and the imaginal world, thus artistically presenting spiritual and mystical notions in terms of symbolisms and allegories.

To illustrate this in Suhrawardī’s stories, I will begin by reviewing some relevant doctrines in Illuminationist philosophy, and then consider how these philosophical principles figure in his stories.

**The Place of the world of Forms and the imaginal world in Illuminationist philosophy**

The theory of the world of Forms was introduced in Greek and Islamic philosophy under a myriad of labels and with numerous interpretations. This theory was, indeed, initially introduced by Plato, and centuries later, the doctrine was transmitted to Muslims during the Islamic translation movement in the 2nd/8th century, when Greek philosophical works were translated into Arabic. At the outset, the Platonic conception was not embraced by Peripatetic Muslim philosophers, and in fact, Avicenna offered arguments to reject the possibility of the existence of such a world. Things began to change in late 5th/11th and early 6th/12th centuries after Islam, when critiques of the Peripatetic philosophical school were rampant, and Suhrawardī presented arguments to prove the existence of the world of Forms, trying to reject Avicenna’s arguments.

Unlike the world of Forms, the imaginal world had no origins in philosophical schools prior to Illuminationist philosophy, all the way back to Ancient Greek Philosophy. To be sure, it was already introduced in Islamic theoretical mysticism, albeit as grounded in mystical intuitions (*shuhūd*) on part of mystics—including Muslim mystics. In fact, it was introduced by Suhrawardī into the Islamic philosophical tradition. Himself an intuitive mystic, Suhrawardī tried to present arguments for the existence of this world, and then draw upon them to provide a philosophical account of certain religious beliefs and mental acts. His attempts paid off: subsequently, the doctrine turned into a well-established doctrine in Islamic philosophy, in the hands of Mullā Ṣadrā, and attracted many advocates, though Suhrawardī’s arguments were largely rejected by Mullā Ṣadrā who then presented alternative arguments, instead.

Light and God as light are the central themes of Suhrawardī’s metaphysics, based on some backgrounds such as Islamic definition in Light Verse of Qur’ān, and the ancient Persian’s teachings. He, of course, has also Greek philosophical sources for his use of light. It is true that at first the Greeks had a fascination with the powers of darkness, but for the Platonists light is superior to darkness. Plato venerates light, for the intelligible realm is not mixed with dark. (See: Walbridge, 2001, pp. 51-53.) In Suhrawardī’s philosophical system which rests upon a system of lights (*fiqh al-anwār*), the world of existence is thought to consist of levels of lights; the highest of which is the Light of Lights (*nūr al-anwār*)—a pure light free of any trace of darkness and imperfection. Based on the principle that “from one, no more than one can issue forth,” from the light of lights only one effect—that is, the first creature—issues forth. The effect is a type of light; it is the closest light to the cause of causes (or the light of lights) and the most powerful light after the light of lights, which is referred to as the “closest light” (*al-nūr al-aqrab*) or *Bahman*. (See: Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 2 (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*), p. 126.)

Unlike Islamic Peripatetic philosophers, Suhrawardī does not restrict the number of longitudinal intellects (*al-‘uqūl al-ṭūlīyya*), or levels of lights, into ten; he believes in innumerable longitudinal intellects. One should bear in mind, though, that dominating lights (*al-anwār al-qāhira*) in Illuminationist philosophy encompass both longitudinal and latitudinal (*al-‘arḍīyya*) intellects. All longitudinal and latitudinal intellects count as non-physical entities, but one important difference between them is that longitudinal intellects stand in efficient causal relations, and thus, longitudinal relations to one another, whereas latitudinal intellects—that is, immaterial or abstract (*mujarrad*) truths in the Platonic world of Forms or lords of the types (*arbāb al-anwā*) —do not stand in efficient (or generative) causal relations to one another, and thus, they bear latitudinal relations to each other. What exists in the material world is brought into existence by latitudinal intellects (or lords of the types in the world of intellectual forms), and these lords of the types are caused by *longitudinal* intellects in higher classes of lights. (See: ibid, pp.143-144.) Now the discontinuous imaginal world (*‘ālam al-mithāl al-munfaṣil*) is located between the material world and the world of Forms (*‘ālam al-muthul*), and thus, it arises from Forms.

**The nature of Forms in Suhrawardī’s view**

Platonic Ideas or, according to Suhrawardī, lords of the types are considered to be universal (that is, non-particular) truths and fully abstract entities, existing in a super-physical world. In Suhrawardī’s view, there is a lord of type in the world of intellectual forms for each natural kind —such as apples, horses, humans, etc.—; a universal truth from which all instances of the kind come into existence and which is present in all of these instances. The world of Forms is the lowest stage of immaterial worlds, and is (in lower causal stages) the gateway to the physical world, so to speak. Suhrawardī is convinced that his mystical vision of Platonic Forms is identical with that experienced by Agathadaemon, Hermes, and Plato himself. (Walbridge,2001, p. 49.)

The discontinuous imaginal world is, nevertheless, a physical world (with shapes, dimensions, and temporality), though it is different from material corporeality, spatiality, and temporality. The imaginal world arises from the world of Forms, and is intermediary between it and the material world.

In his exposition of the issue of fallacies, Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī illustrates the reality of Forms as follows:

The philosopher, Suhrawardī, believed that every physical kind has a Form in the world of intellect, which consists in a simple illuminated form. The simple intellectual form is self-subsistent and is not spatial. These intellectual forms are real and existent, because they function as spirits for specific forms, and these physical forms are their embodiments; that is, their shadows. For the intellectual forms are fine-grained, and these embodiments are coarse-grained. These illuminated forms are called “Forms.” (Shīrāzī, 1383, p. 251)

And in his account of Suhrawardī’s view of Forms, Fanārī writes:

Shaykh al-Ishrāq [Suhrawardī] and divine sages among his followers have contrived the theory that physical bodies have Forms. If the body is a type, its detached form will be called the “lord of the type” which is the same as Platonic Form. These intellectual forms belong to the level of Latitudinal Intellects, which is above the level of souls and below that of longitudinal detached intellects. They bring physical types into existence and retain them. And if the body is an individual, then its detached form will be of an imaginary type, which is the same as a dangling form (*al-mithāl al-mu‘allaq*) and an image existing below the world of souls and above the material world. (Fanārī, 1373, p. 421)

Although Suhrawardī was the first to introduce, and argue for, the discontinuous imaginal world in the Islamic philosophical tradition, he did not provide a clear-cut account of how this world emerges. Later, Shahrzūrī and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrazī—students of Suhrawardī and commentators on his seminal book, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*—drew upon Suhrawardī’s philosophical principles to account for how the discontinuous imaginal world came to emerge. They suggest that Platonic Forms (*al-‘uqul al-mutakāfia*, that is, lords of the types) are of two types: some are at higher levels and others at lower ones. Those at higher levels give rise to the discontinuous imaginal world, and those at lower levels give rise to the material world:

Lords of the types are of two kinds: those arising from observations of lights, and those arising from illuminations of higher lights. And the world of images must have been brought into existence by lords of the types arising from observations, and the world of matter must have been brought out by lords of the types arising from illuminations, since lights arising from observations are nobler than lights from illuminations, and the discontinuous imaginal world is, in turn, nobler than the material world, – based on “the nobler one will be the cause of the nobler, and the meaner will be the cause of the meaner.” (Shahrzūrī, 1993/1372, p. 370)

A similar account is offered by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī for specific truths of the world of Forms and their causation of the discontinuous imaginal world and the material world, adding: “there is a correlation between the imaginal world and the world of matter, in the sense that whatever exists in the material sensible world has a corresponding imaginal form in the discontinuous imaginal world [and not vice versa]” (al-Shīrāzī, 2004/1383, p. 340).

Suhrawardī tried to account for shared features by tokens of each kind in terms of their relations to, and derivation from, truths of Forms; for example, tokens of the human being, such as John, Elizabeth, and Richard, are particularly related to each other and share their human characteristics in virtue of sharing the lord of the human type. In other words, Suhrawardī attributes systematic features observed in things, such as particular features observed in human beings or those observable in vegetables, to lords of the types. In fact, Suhrawardī replaces “providence“ (*‘ināya*) in Peripatetic philosophical system with “Forms“ in his Illuminationist philosophy.

For every vegetative kind, there needs to be one thing which is abstract from the matter and has providence over it. (Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 1 (*Muṭāriḥāt*), p. 459)

It must be noted that truths in the world of Forms are not spatial or temporal, and belong to the world of intellects and detached entities. As Mullā Ṣadrā suggests, the doctrine of Forms amounts to the view that every physical kind has a full-fledged wholly abstract or immaterial entity in the world of detached entities, which serves as the principle and origin of its physical instantiations, where these instantiations are ancillaries or effects of the original universal entity. Unlike the physical instantiations, the universal entity is not in need of matter and location, thanks to its perfection and completeness. (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989/1368, vol. 2, p. 62)

In suggesting that for everything in the material world, there is a lord of the type in the world of intellect, Suhrawardī means to refer to only material substances, rather than properties, such as whiteness, sphericality, and so on, which have no such lords. Whenever a substance is brought into existence by a lord of the type, its concomitant accidents will by the same token come into being, without a need for an independent creation by their own lord of the type. That is, in his view, although accidents have quiddity-based originality (or principality), their relations with higher worlds are mediated by substances to which they occur. Therefore, there is no need to consider separate intellectual origins for a perfume and its smell, or for a piece of sugar and its taste. Instead, each pair has one and the same illuminated truth in virtue of whose shadow on the material world, the perfume comes to have a smell or the piece of sugar comes to have a taste (Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 2 (*Hikmat al-Ishrāq*), pp. 159-160). In contrast, Mullā Ṣadrā generalized the doctrine of Forms to accidents as well. Thus, he attributes lords of the types in the world of Forms to all attributes and virtues (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989/1368, vol. 2, p. 79).

As pointed out, however, Suhrawardī does not take all types-related Forms to be at the same level; that is, despite the fact that there is no causal relation among them, it is not the case that they are all at the same level of strength or weakness as far as their illumination is concerned. In fact, just as physical types are of varying existential degrees (the human physical type is, for instance, superior to vegetative types) notwithstanding non-causal relations among them in the material world, such degrees do exist among their intellectual forms as well. For example, the lord of the human type is superior to that of animals and that of vegetables (Suhrawardī 1996/1375, vol. 1 (*Muṭāriḥāt*), pp. 459-460). Suhrawardī identifies the lord of the human soul with the “Holy Spirit” (*Rūḥ al-Qudus*) following the religious language, and with “Active Intellect” (*al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*) as in the philosophical literature (ibid, vol. 3 (*Hayākil al-Nūr*), pp. 96-97).

**Suhrawardī’s view of the nature of image**

By recognizing discontinuous images as having a separate world from that of intellectual forms, Suhrawardī remarkably contributed to explanations and analyses of imaginative creations and impressions of the soul, as well as doctrines of *barzakh* (the intermediary world or purgatory), the Heaven, and the Hell. He deems imaginal truths in the imaginal world as discontinuous and independent: as an imaginal abstract realm located between the world of matter and the world of Forms. This version of the imaginal world was never theorized before Illuminationist philosophy. Peripatetic philosophers had boiled imagination down to a material entity, being imprinted in the matter, although its material identity is superior to that of other material entities (ibid: p. 195).

According to Peripatetic philosophers, imaginary forms are qualities—types of qualities or properties—imprinted in the matter (that is, the brain). The locus of the faculty of imagination is part of the brain, and the only abstract faculty is that of intellection. Suhrawardī criticized the Peripatetic view—he believed that it made no sense for imaginary forms to be material. He then proposed the discontinuous imaginal world to be a world existing in the “arc of descent” (*qaws al-nuzūl*), below the world of Forms and above the world of matter. The imaginal world is, he suggests, neither material, nor part of Platonic forms—it has certain attributes of both. Thus, the world of discontinuous imagination (or discontinuous imaginal world) does have certain physical attributes, such as dimensions, shapes, colors, spatiality, and temporality, but it lacks the mass or stuff—it exists as a fine body. It is temporal and spatial in a non-material sense, which is close to absolute non-temporality and non-spatiality (of abstract entities).

One basic distinction between “Forms” and “images” is that the former is intelligible, whereas the latter is visible, sensible, tactile, gustatory, and olfactory. The imaginal world is a perceptible world, while the intellectual worlds—including the world of Forms—is abstract from sensory features. The difference between the two is pointed out by Suhrawardī, where he affirms that by the “imaginal world” he does not mean to refer to Platonic Forms (ibid: vol. 2, pp. 230-231).

However, the point of agreement between Platonic Forms and entities in the imaginal world is that both imaginary forms in the imaginal world and intelligible truths in the world of Platonic Forms are immaterial and self-subsistent Entities in the imaginal world are called “*mithāl*”, in Arabic; and those in the Platonic world are called “*muthul*”, which are of the same lexical root—this is not a case of polysemy; it is, instead, a case of univocality; that is, the two words have the same lexical root, which means a manifestation of what is at the higher stage and a presentation of what is at the lower stage (see Jawādī Āmulī, vol. 2, p. 269).

The discontinuous imaginal world is an independent world—having nothing to do with the human soul’s imagination or imaginative faculty. In fact, the imaginal world is, just like sensory and intelligible worlds, a full-fledged and self-subsistent world. Such a picture of imagination as a separate world had no precedents in philosophical schools prior to Suhrawardī, and he explicitly suggests that he had a mystical intuition of this world before providing philosophical arguments for it. Of this world, Mullā Ṣadrā writes:

Since its original creation, this world has been the endpoint of the world of matter and the starting point of the spiritual world … the imaginal world has both physical and spiritual features. (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1982/1361, pp. 242-243)

He refers to the discontinuous imaginal world as a mountain standing between the intelligible and the material world (1984/1363, p. 465). While the mountain is interposed between the two realms, it serves to connect them as well. Indeed, the discontinuous imaginal world is an intersection of all paths of descent and ascent—a passageway of all graces from superior worlds bestowed upon the lower worlds.

On the one hand, the discontinuous imagination or the imaginal world is the origin of material forms in the natural world, and whatever exists in the material world has an original reality in the imaginal world; that is, all natural beings count as its shadows and images. On the other hand, imaginal forms are manifestations or loci of the revelation of intelligible forms; that is, whatever exists in the world of intellects has a shadow or a weaker degree of existence in the imaginal world (See: Corbin, 1989, p. ix). So, the imaginal world is a level of existence at which entities of the hidden world are embodied and material natural beings are spiritualized or immaterialized. To put things differently, the imaginary world makes it possible for spirits to become embodied and makes it possible for bodies to be spiritualized.

Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī says the following about the discontinuous imaginal world:

This world is stronger than matter in that it is not material, and it is weaker than intellects in that it has quantities and quantitative forms. In other words, imaginary forms are more abstract than the sensory, and are less abstract than the world of intellect. Consequently, they are located in an intermediary world between the worlds of intellect and matter (Al-Shīrāzī, 2004/1383, p. 470).

According to Suhrawardī, the faculty of imagination is a manifestation of abstract imaginary forms. Here, “manifestation” is tantamount to the faculty being the locus of the appearance of immaterial imaginary forms, though the locus is not itself an abstract truth. This entire metaphysical concept of imagination, which Ibn *‘*Arabī has also borrowed from, is bound up with the intermediate world. (Corbin, 1969, p. 190.) Thus, in Suhrawardī’s view, it is obvious that the abstract truth of imaginary form is not imprinted in the faculty of imagination, as Avicenna suggested, and it requires no locus; however, it does not display itself unless there is such a manifestation.

Certain Islamic doctrines concerning the grave and the posthumous realm came across Muslim philosophers as defying any explanations; however, Suhrawardī drew upon the discontinuous imaginal world as a realm with its own quantity, embodiment, and temporality in order to provide accounts of these complicated doctrines. In his account of bodily resurrection, Avicenna had suggested that although there are propositions in Islamic texts which imply bodily resurrection, what can be accounted for in terms of rational arguments is just the survival of the immaterial soul. For, in Peripatetic philosophy, beyond the material world was the world of purely abstract or intellectual entities to which shapes, dimensions, embodiment, temporality, and the like cannot meaningfully apply. Avicenna finally accepted bodily posthumous events, not based on any philosophical argumentations, but as a case of religious obedience—the obligation to endorse whatever the Prophet of Islam has said (Avicenna 1983/1404, p. 423). In contrast. Suhrawardī suggests that once we believe in the discontinuous imaginal world we can easily understand, and make sense of, religious doctrines concerning the resurrection of bodies, bodily features of the Hell and the Heaven (lovely-eyed virgins or *ḥūr al-‘īn*, servant boys, gardens, streams, sweet fruits, and other formal blessings), in addition to spiritual and rational pleasures or sufferings.

Moreover, Suhrawardī believes that certain beliefs about hidden facts, such as a heavenly messenger talking to prophets and saints with a very euphonious voice, a beautiful human face appearing to them and giving them some news of the hidden, or an inscription in the sky being seen by them, are to be accounted for in terms of the imaginal world—these are all imagery forms in *ālam al-mithāl* or the imaginal world.

Furthermore, he maintains that whatever is seen in dreams with all its colorfulness and variety exists in the imaginal world. Thus, he identifies dreams as imaginal, since dreams cannot be found in material directions (whereas they would be had direction, if they been material), and when one wakes up from a dream, she moves from the imaginal to the material realm, without having made a physical movement. What is more, Suhrawardī accounts for images and forms of Gabriel and other intelligible angels in terms of the discontinuous imaginal world (see Suhrawardī 1996/1375, vol. 2, pp. 240-243). Thus, when the form of the Angel, for example, projects itself into a human form, this act take place on the plane of the discontinuous imagination, which then raise the image to the plane of the continuous imagination. (Corbin, 1969, p. 220.)

It is noteworthy that in his discussion of the imaginal world, Suhrawardī restricts himself to the discontinuous imaginal world, forgoing an elaboration of the human imaginal world—that is, the continuous imagination or the human faculty of imagination. Having acknowledged Suhrawardī’s doctrine of the imaginal world, Mullā Ṣadrā draws a distinction between discontinuous and continuous (*muttaṣil*) imaginary forms.

According to Mullā Ṣadrā and his followers, bound imaginations (that is, continuous imaginal world) do not have objective origins in the discontinuous imaginal world. To the contrary, unreal and sometimes devilish imaginations are manipulations of the human faculty of imagination, arising from concentration failures and preoccupations with the natural world. Such imagined forms survive only as long as the subject’s soul keeps paying attention to them, and once the soul stops to attend to them, they fade away (Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989/1368, vol. 1, p. 303).

According to the Illuminationist Philosophy, however, whatever exists in the material world exists in the imaginal realm, in a superior and more complete manner. That is, if elements and heavenly spheres exist in the material realm, then they must have analogues in the discontinuous imaginal realm as well. Thus, the imaginal world is greater than the world of matter, as it involves many more stages: if something does not exist in the imaginal realm, then it does not exist in the material world either. The same relation obtains between the imaginal world and the world of Forms. Mullā Ṣadrā makes it explicit that “those believing in imaginal forms in the imaginal world believe in Platonic Forms as well” (1989/1368, vol. 1, p. 302, and vol. 2, p. 52).

**The function of the world of Forms and the imaginal world in Illuminationist art**

Art, in many cases, deals with bringing concepts down to forms. Now, since concepts are considered as abstract and immaterial, and physical forms are closely tied to sensory objectivity, one of the most crucial mysteries of the art world has turned out to be the relation between concepts and forms. Here analogies and symbolism come to play in art so as to represent abstract concepts in terms of sensible forms. By analogy here, I mean the symbolizing of abstract truths in terms of perceptible forms, or according to jargons of Illuminationist philosophy, the manifestation of intellectual forms in terms of the imaginal forms.

In fact, Ishraqi philosophers regard “meaning” as a thing’s inner and covert truth, as opposed to its “form” which consists in its outer and overt reality. In their view, the great task of the faculty of imagination is to convert meanings into perceptible forms. Our imagination makes it possible for us to describe hidden truths, by deploying attributes of the manifest world.

Thus, the role of the faculty of imagination does not boil down to keeping an archive of sensory forms. It undertakes the understanding of imaginal truths as well. The main function of imagination is to make connections between the sensory and the intelligible through bestowing physical attributes upon detached immaterial truths (embodiment of spirits) and spiritual attributes upon material objects (spiritualization of bodies). And because of this intermediary nature, the imaginary forms culminate in the notion of the symbol, for the intermediary “symbolizes with” the worlds it mediates. (Corbin, 1969, p. 217.)

It must be noted that, according to Ishraq philosophy, intelligible truths in the world of Forms (along with their instances) do have separate manifestations in the discontinuous imaginal world. In some hadiths, we can find remarks interpretable as the manifestation of an intellectual form in terms of a perceptible form in the imaginal world. One case in point is the following hadith in which an event in the night of the Ascent (*mi‘rāj*) of Prophet Muhammad is narrated:

God has a rooster occupying the whole world from east to west. Its two legs are in the seventh earth, its head in the divine throne, and its neck under the throne. … The rooster has two wings, and when it flutters them, it crosses the east and the west. … And whenever it crows, all roosters on the earth begin to crow. (Al-Majlisī, 1983/1404, vol. 56, p. 181)

The same hadith is also quoted from Muḥammad ibn ‘Alī al-Bāqir (the Prophet’s great grandson and the Fifth Shiite Imam), only with the following difference: the rooster flutters its two wings near dawn and recites “All-Pure, All-Holy, our Lord Allah the King, the Truth, the Manifest.” Then roosters on the earth flutter their wings and recite the same (al-Kulaynī, 1986/1365, vol. 8, p. 273).

In Suhrawardī’s view, the tale of the rooster can be regarded as a manifestation of the Platonic form of rooster in the discontinuous imaginal world, which was intuited by the Prophet. The manifestation fits well with descriptions of intellectual forms of objects in the world of Forms and its features in the imaginal world.

Shahrzūrī, the most reliable commentator of the Illuminationist philosophy, explicitly refers to the manifestation, and descent, of all abstract entities and intellects in the discontinuous imaginal world:

And in this vast infinite imaginal world, there are great, valuable, gorgeous, and awesome images in which the first cause displays itself, and images eligible for the manifestation of the First Intellect, and for each abstract intellect there are many images in forms that are eligible for their manifestations.

… And it is possible for the imaginal world to be a manifestation of the Exalted Necessary Being and other abstract entities—they all manifest themselves in specific forms and at specific times as appropriate to the receiver’s capacity. (Shahrzūrī, 1992/1372, p. 555)

Therefore, not only the intellectual Forms in the world of *Muthul* —which are, according to Illuminationist philosophy, at the lowest level of intellects—but also abstract and detached entities of higher levels as well as the First Intellect (the closest light) can have imaginal manifestations in the world of *mithāl* in proper forms. This is where an analogue of a transcendent abstract reality comes to be realized in perceptible forms.

Shahrzūrī emphasizes that, in addition to imaginal forms arising from detached intellects, there is another variety of imaginal forms, arising in the manner of emergence and renewal as a result of lowly imaginations, which might as well be nullified and annihilated after contrast and imagination, whereas imaginal forms arising from detached intellects are lights accompanied by a spiritual breeze (ibid, p. 554). Lowly imaginations are forms imagined by an individual from their personal this-worldly and lustful desires, rather than from a pure desire to represent transcendent truths.

When manifested as an instance of the universal truth of the lord of the types (as in the story of the Prophet seeing a manifestation of Platonic rooster in the imaginal world during his Ascent), these imaginal forms represent the intelligible truth, which is embodied in the imaginal world appropriately to its own features. Now if the imaginal form is individuated, then it will not be a manifestation of the Platonic truth itself; it will instead be an instance thereof.

**Suhrawardī’s allegories**

The principles of Illuminationist philosophy concerning the world of intellectual Forms and the imaginal world are remarkably capable of being extended to the realm of art. In order to illustrate his philosophy and his spiritual beliefs, Suhrawardī began writing allegories and created symbols based on his philosophical principles. Here I will point to some of these allegories and their philosophical foundations derived from the Illuminationist conception of the worlds of *muthul* and *mithāl*.

Suhrawardī has written ten symbolic stories: *The Crimson Intellect* (*‘Aql-i Surkh*), *The Sound of Gabriel’s Wing* (*Āwāz-i Par-i Jabra’īl*), *The Language of Ants* (*Lughat-i Mūrān*), *A Day with a Group of Sufis* (*Rūzī bā Jamā‘at-i Ṣūfīyān*), *Simurgh’s Whistle* (*Ṣafīr-i Sīmurgh*), *An Essay on the State of Childhood* (*Risāla fī Ḥālat al-Ṭufūlīyya*), *An Essay on the Reality of Love* (*Risāla fī Ḥaqīqat al-‘Ishq*) or *The* *Companion of Lovers* (*Mūnis al-‘Ushshāq*), *An Essay on the Ascent* (*Risāla fī al-Mi‘rāj*), *The Treatise of the Birds* (*Risālat al-Ṭayr*), and *The Western Exile* (*al-Ghurbat al-Gharbīyya*), which mainly concern spiritual journeys and immaterial truths. In other words, considering these allegorical stories, we can acknowledge the fact that “persian sufism with its love mysticism and highly developed symbolic universe served for Suhrawardī.” (Walbridge, 2001, p. 11.) Most of these stories are in Persian and some are translated into Arabic.

Almost none of the characters, places, and events described in these stories exist in the external material world. Instead, it is as if they lie in a peculiar space and world outside the reach of our external senses—they exist in the discontinuous imaginal world. Suhrawardī refers to this world as “Nowhereland” (in Persian, “*nākujaābād*”) which symbolically refers to its abstraction from material space and location.

Let us now review some of these stories to find out the main themes of Suhrawardī’s allegories and show main symbolisms therein:

**1. Meeting the Master**

The main adventure in Suhrawardī’s symbolic stories is a meeting, and dialogue, with a spiritual master. Most of his allegories feature a meeting with a sage who dispenses wisdom. (Walbridge, 2001, p. 43.) In his *al-Talwīḥāt*, Suhrawardī recounts the story of his own meeting and dialogue with Aristotle. As he makes it explicit, the meeting occurred in an ecstatic state similar to a dream after a long time of reflection, asceticism, and spiritual journey accompanied by extreme spiritual pleasure and spiritual illumination (Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 1 (*al-Talwīḥāt*), p. 70). Elsewhere, he says that the meeting occurred in an ecstasy in Jābarṣā—a city in the imaginal world. He also refers to a similar state of the ascent of his soul to the imaginal world in a story of Hermes and his dialogue with his heavenly father (ibid, p. 108). One might as well say that heavenly masters featuring in Suhrawardī’s stories—the core of which is a meeting with them—come from his own experiences or those of other mystics.

At any rate, one main theme of most of these symbolic stories is a meeting between a spiritual traveler and his or her heavenly origin. The heavenly origin, who encourages and guides a disciple to migrate from the earthly exile, is the intellectual lord of human beings manifesting itself to the spiritual traveler in the form of a human body—as a spiritual master—in the imaginal world. The disciple comes to feel constricted and troubled in this dark world, and thanks to the awakening of his sense of exile, the mystic comes to perceive where he is now, where he came from, and where he should go back to. He seeks to return to his origin—he pursues reunion with the lights of the world of intellects, which are his real fathers.

Upon his return, however, the spiritual traveler needs a guide. This is the opening event both in Avicenna’s allegory of *Ḥayy ibn Yaqẓān* (Alive son of Awake) and Suhrawardī’s brief essay *The Sound of Gabriel’s Wing*. There is a symmetry between the disciple’s coming to an awareness of her/himself and the guide’s appearance through his/her soul. The guide here is an imaginal form in mystical analogies.

In his early allegories, Suhrawardī still symbolizes and thus promotes the Avicennan belief in ten intellects. For example, at the opening of the allegory of *The Sound of Gabriel’s Wing*, the mystical traveler meets ten masters, each in his own place in the spiritual hierarchy. When Suhrawardī developed his own philosophical views and rejected the idea of ten detached intellects, he began to deploy the analogy of “lords of the types” in his symbolic stories in terms of the Platonic view. As pointed out before, this intellectual form or the lord of the type, takes an imaginal form and descends to the discontinuous imaginal world, where one can meet it.

In the essay, *An Exposition of the Companion of Lovers*, which is a commentary on Suhrawardī’s *Companion of Lovers*, the anonymous commentator—who probably lived in 7th/13th or early 8th/14th centuries—explicates the part concerning the meeting with the master. In one part of the story, Suhrawardī says: “at the gate of the city, an old man and a young man were hired. The old man was named ‘Sophia Perennis’ (*jāvīdan khirad*, or the Eternal Intellect),” and the commentator explains it as follows: “the old man is the ‘First Intellect’ to which he refers as ‘Sophia Perennis’ and the young man is the ‘Soul of the Whole’ (*nafs al-kull*); the soul is younger than intellect, because it is caused by it, and the cause is necessarily prior to the effect.”

Moreover, Suhrawardī writes, “he constantly travels, while he does not move from where he is,” and the commentator explains this as follows: “by ‘traveling’ he means the propagation of the blessings of the intellect among beings, and by ‘not moving’ he means that it is impossible for it to move, because movement is characteristic of physical objects; thus, it is impossible for non-physical objects to move.” And regarding Suhrawardī’s words, “he is so old, but he has not seen a year. He is elderly, but frailty has not found its way to him,” the commentator explains: “by ‘old’ he points to the eternity of the intelligible world, and by ‘has not seen a year’, he means that in the physical world, years are measured by days, and days are measured by hours, and hours are measured by time, and time is measured by the movement of spheres, and spheres belong to the physical world, whereas the intellect is beyond the physical world” (Nasr, 2003/1382, p. 280).

In his story of *Simurgh’s Whistle*, Suhrawardī draws upon the symbol of “Simurgh” as a dual entity, which combines opposites. Simurgh is a symbol for the flight or ascent of humans. Simurgh consists of 30 birds, which is a symbolism for the unity and omnipresence of the lord of the types in all its particulars. This entity can fly to the celestial realm, or in Suhrawardī’s own terms, to “the east of the greatest divinity (*lāhūt*).”

According to Suhrawardī, every spiritual traveler is a “hoopoe”: if he intends to ascend, then he will endure hardships on his path towards the place of “Simurgh”:

It turns into a Simurgh whose whistle awakens the dormant and whose place is in Mount Qāf. His whistle reaches everyone, but he has few audiences; everyone is with him, but most are without him. … And he wipes out various colors. Simurgh soars without moving, flies without a plumage, and approaches without crossing places. All patterns are from him, while he has no colors. His nest is in the east, while he occupies the west as well. Everyone is preoccupied with him, while he is careless about everyone. And all knowledge comes from the whistle of this Simurgh. (Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 3 (*Ṣafīr Simurgh*), p. 315)

Phrases such as “flying without plumage”, “approaching without crossing places”, and “illuminating all colors while being colorless” hint at the immateriality or abstractness of Simurgh, as the Active Intellect and the intellectual form of humanness. And the phrase, “everyone is with him, and most are without him”, suggests the factual or existential presence of Simurgh in all tokens of the human species, while he is hidden and unknown due to human negligence and indulgence in the world of "material darkness" (*al-ghawāsiq al-māddīyya*).

**2. The soul’s troubles and exile**

In the allegory of *The Treatise of the Bird*, Suhrawardī portrays this world as a trap in which our souls, symbolized as free birds, are captivated. We hope for a seemingly pleasant and delightful place, but we end up in a cage. The cage is a symbolism for our body, in which our soul is captivated and to which we come to be accustomed (see Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 3 (*Risālat al-Ṭayr*), p. 200).

Admittedly, the story of the soul’s exile, which is imprisoned in the city of the physical body, has precedents in the words of Sufis, neo-Platonic philosophers, and Gnostic schools. In Suhrawardī’s story, the land towards which the westernized soul travels is Transoxiana, in the east—the land of horizons of light—and the place of his exile is Kairouan (Qayrawān) in the west—located at the other side of Egypt.

Indeed, in *The Story of the Western Exile*, Suhrawardī offers a different account of the soul’s captivity in the “world of darkness” from the one he provides in *The* *Treatise of the Bird*. The protagonist in the *Western Exile* is confined in a pit or a cave in “Maghreb” (the west), and he finds his way to salvation by traveling towards “Yemen” (literally: the right side), which is a symbolism for the “east.” According to Henry Corbin, the word “east” in Suhrawardī’s views has turned into a technical term. Literally speaking, it refers to both the geographical east—more precisely, the Persian world—and the hour at which the horizon is illuminated with the light of dawn.

Thus, in his *Western Exile*, Suhrawardī sees the world as a cave through which the spiritual traveler might find his way towards the truth—a journey beginning from the dark material world in which the traveler is confined and ending in the east of lights, which was the soul’s original home (Nasr 2004/1383, p. 219). In many traditional philosophies, there has been a deep tie between microcosm and macrocosm. Thus, the human inner journey within the depths of his or her own being is deemed related to a journey towards different stages of, and beyond the world. To escape from the prison of the “commanding soul” (*al-nafs al-ammar*: an inner force that compels us towards devilish acts) is to cross the vestibule of the world (ibid, p. 243). Thus, the journey from the west of macrocosm to its east is a symbol of the journey from the commanding soul towards the “confident soul” (*al-nafs al-muṭma‘inna*), in microcosm.

The story of exile and the soul’s captivity is further dramatized in this essay by receiving a letter from the father—the heavenly father (the lord of the human type) in the land of Yemen (the east). The feeling of homesickness is deteriorated in souls of western captives once they receive these letters and news.

**3. Obstacles on the way of spiritual journey**

In Suhrawardī’s stories, the main instruction a spiritual traveler receives from the master is how to travel towards higher worlds of light, be released from the material prison, and be alert to other obstacles on the way. In different essays, these obstacles include inner and outer impediments. They are recounted by way of symbolisms, some of which I shall consider below.

In *Western Exile*, obstacles appear as soon as the protagonist embarks on the ship amidst storms until he arrives at the Sinai (the desert of mysticism) and meets the intellectual lord of his type. On his way, the spiritual traveler reaches the positions of Moses, Solomon, Lot, and Dhu-l-Qarnayn. The events unfold as inspired by Quranic verses in which the stories of these prophets are recounted.

At the opening of the *Western Exile*, there is a symbolism of the dark pit, dominated by an extreme darkness in which one cannot even see his own hands. This is a symbolism for the view that matter is such a veil through which light can barely pass. On top of the Kairouan pit is a huge castle with lofty towers—this is a symbolism for the world of elements or the faculties of the soul. The two captives in the pit could leave the pit just at nights (and not during the days), which is a symbolism for the possibility of arriving at the intelligible or spiritual world only at the time of death (Nasr 2004/1383, p. 220).

Aside from external obstacles in the material world, the spiritual traveler encounters inner obstacles in his own soul as well. In *The* *Companion of Lovers*, Suhrawardī provides an elaborate account of these obstacles, and in a tour of the city of the soul’s faculties, he analogizes these faculties to persons on thrones with four different tempers (see Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 3 (*Munis al-‘Ushshāq*), pp. 276 and 277). Suhrawardī points out that the spiritual traveler should vigilantly face up to the faculties of his soul. Interestingly, descriptions of surfaces of the imaginal form of each psychological faculty are congruous with features of each faculty as conceived of in Illuminationist philosophy. For example, the following description seems to imply the faculty of imagination: “when he sees him, he begins flattering and seducing him with colorful things, displaying himself to the traveler in a different form at each moment. The traveler should ignore him, turn away from him, and shout to his vehicle in order to make it start running fast.” The faculty of imagination provokes a whole host of wasted imaginations in the soul of a novice spiritual traveler, constituting a huge hindrance to the traveler at early stages of her spiritual path. Thus, one should not follow his faculty of imagination. This is why Suhrawardī suggests that one should shrug it off and run away from it as fast as possible.

These obstacles are differently depicted in the *Western Exile* story, where the two captives in the pit of Kairouan escape the pit overnight, embark on a ship, then a wave comes between the traveler and his son, and the son is drowned. At length, the traveler arrives at the mountain of Gog and Magog, and then he sees jinn and fairies as well as a spring of a flowing copper. The traveler asks the fairies to blow into the copper in order to transform it into fire, from which he builds a barrier against God and Magog. The traveler then passes through 14 coffins—which are, according to Illuminationist psychology, the 14 faculties of the soul—and 10 tombs—the five external and the five internal psychological faculties in Suhrawardī’s view. Having left behind all these stations and obstacles, the traveler arrives at a light—the Active Intellect and the governing force of this world.

The traveler begins climbing Mount Sinai, and eventually he meets his father. The father is indeed the lord of the human type, shining with a dazzling light. The father tells him that his own father—that is, the whole intellect, resides above them, and beyond him are their relatives (that is, a hierarchy of intellects from dominating intellects up to the closest intellect), up to their greatest ancestor—the pure light (see Nasr 2004/1383, pp. 220-221).

Having alluded to the encounter with the faculties of the soul in *The Companion of Lovers*, however, Suhrawardī grapples with the human struggle with his moral vices. He depicts these obstacles—these moral characteristics—in relevant animal forms, such as “a wild boar engaged, day and night, in slaughtering and tearing apart” and “a lion engaged in theft and gluttony” (Suhrawardī, 1996/1375, vol. 3 (*Munis al-‘Ushshāq*), p. 280).

These impediments to the spiritual journey are differently symbolized in *The Sound of Gabriel’s Wing*, where the master describes Gabriel’s wing to the traveler (the protagonist):

Beware that Gabriel has two wings: one on the right, which is pure light. This wing is wholly his relation to God. And he has a wing on the left with some spots of darkness on it, just like the dark spots on the moon. It resembles the legs of peafowls, and this is an indication that he has a dimension of nonbeing. (ibid, vol. 3 (*The Sound of Gabriel’s Wing*), p. 220)

This is a symbolism for the doctrine that the Active Intellect has two dimensions: creaturely and divine. In its divine dimension, it receives grace from higher intellects, and in its creaturely dimension, it bestows grace upon human souls. Gabriel’s two wings are symbolisms for the dual dimension of contingent beings.

On the whole, in his allegories or symbols, Suhrawardī constructs his characters usually as diluted symbols of universal Platonic forms in the discontinuous imaginal world, such as Simurgh, the master, and the father, which are apparently symbols for the lord of the human type, as well as the pit in Kairouan, the battle with dragons, being drowned in the sea, the lure of seeds, captivity in the fisherman’s net, and the like, all of which are symbols for general challenges on the way of human spiritual journey and life. In its own way, each of these represents universal attributes and obstacles in an imaginal space-time. Such an imaginal space-time enables him to express the conflicts and events in an ethereal and unfamiliar way, recounting general and familiar predicaments of his audience in a novel unfamiliar context.

**Conclusion**

Suhrawardī has provided an elaborate account of lords of the types in the world of intellectual forms and fine bodily entities in the discontinuous imaginal world, wherefore he has created serious capacities for artistic symbolisms and representations, and as the first philosopher within the Islamic philosophical tradition who established Platonic Forms and presented an argument for the existence of the imaginal world, he deployed this philosophical capacity in his own allegories. As considerations in this paper reveal, there is a close tie between Suhrawardī’s allegories and contents of his philosophical system. Thanks to this tie, Suhrawardī has illustrated his spiritual doctrines in symbolic forms of characters and allegorical adventures. Moreover, his exploitation of the characteristics of the world of intellectual forms and the imaginal world plays a central role in these allegories.

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