

Comparative Study between Dante's The Devine Comedy and The Message of Forgiveness by Abu al Ala al-Maari / CHEKHNABA imane

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Submission date	Acceptance date	Publication date
29 / 06 / 2024	14 / 08 / 2024	01 / 09 / 2024

Abstract

The spread of what the West has taken from Arabs in the field of experimental science has covered what has been taken from literature. Arabic language affected many countries and the republics of Central Asia that are still written in the Arabic script to this day. The Divine Comedy is an Italian narrative poem written by Dante Alighieri is widely considered the pre-eminent work in Italian literature and one of the greatest works. The poem's imaginative vision of the afterlife is representative of the medieval worldview as it existed in the Western Church. The researchers found a great similarities between the Divine Comedy and The Message of Forgiveness of Abu al-Ala al-Maari, the first to raise this controversy was the Spanish Orientalist priest Palatius 1919 in which he confirmed the effect of The Message of Forgiveness in comedy and supported by Arabic pens. Hence this study, tries to reveal what our Islamic literature has provided to the literature of West, and to clarify some aspects of the latter's influence on it. It also aims to show the similarities between these two important works and show to what extent Dante's work was influenced and taken from Islamic Literature

Keywords: Dante Alighieri, Islamic literature, The Divine Comedy, The Message of Forgiveness, western literature

1. Introduction

What is well-known to everyone is that the widespread dissemination of what the West has taken from us in the field of experimental sciences and the attempt by many sincere and fair individuals to talk only about this aspect has overshadowed what the West has taken from our literature and its precise impact in this field. Therefore, this paper tries to reveal what our Islamic literature has offered to Western literature and to make certain aspects clear about the influence exerted by the last on it.

The topic of this study starts by presenting a definition of Islamic literature and then pointing out the most important passages that allowed Islamic literature to reach Europe and, thus, its impact. It tackles the impact of poetry, the story, and the play in their counterparts of the literate genre in Europe. Though the period that followed the 14th century was full of broad and profound influences, it needs an independent study due to its complexity and diversity, despite its short temporal lifespan compared to the period before it, especially as it relates to improved and diversified means of communication.

In the vast expanse of literary history, few works have delved as deeply into the essence of forgiveness and the human soul's journey toward redemption as Dante Alighieri's "The Divine Comedy." This epic poem stands as a monumental exploration of the afterlife's intricate landscapes, guiding readers through the harrowing depths of Hell (Inferno), the purgatorial ascent of Mount Purgatory (Purgatorio), and the celestial realms of Paradise (Paradiso). At its core, "The Divine Comedy" serves not only as a reflection on the moral and theological conceptions of its time but also as a timeless meditation on the power of forgiveness.

Dante's journey, allegorically representing the soul's quest for salvation, is punctuated by encounters with souls in various states of sin and redemption, each illustrating the profound consequences of human actions and the divine mercy that awaits those who seek it. Through these vivid portrayals, Dante articulates a nuanced message: forgiveness is a divine attribute, manifesting in the sinner's repentance and the willingness to forgive oneself and others. This complex interplay between justice and mercy, punishment and forgiveness, underscores the poem's enduring relevance.

"The Divine Comedy" eloquently argues that forgiveness is not merely a passive act but a dynamic process that involves self-reflection, repentance, and, ultimately, understanding. It suggests that divine Comedy—God's grand narrative—is one of hope and redemption, where forgiveness plays a pivotal role in the soul's journey toward the divine. In this introduction, we will explore how Dante's masterpiece intricately weaves the theme of forgiveness through its allegorical narrative, offering insights into the human condition and the transformative power of divine grace. Through all these, the following questions are drawn:

Research questions:

1.How is forgiveness portrayed in "The Divine Comedy" compared to [another work/literary tradition]?

2.What role does divine intervention play in forgiveness within "The Divine Comedy" and its counterparts?

3.In what ways do the historical and cultural contexts of "The Divine Comedy" and [another work/literary tradition] influence their messages of forgiveness?

Research Aims:

1.To compare and contrast the influence of divine versus human agency in facilitating forgiveness in the selected works, understanding the theological and philosophical underpinnings that guide these narratives.

2.To evaluate the impact of historical and cultural contexts on the depiction of forgiveness, exploring how these factors enrich the texts' messages and their relevance to contemporary discussions on forgiveness and redemption.

3.To contribute to the scholarly discourse on forgiveness in literature, offering a comprehensive comparative analysis that bridges Dante's allegorical exploration with other significant literary or philosophical works, illuminating the multifaceted nature of forgiveness across time and cultures.

2.Literature Review

Arabic literature initially flourished in the Arabian Peninsula with the advent of Islam in the 7th century. The Quran, considered the highest form of Arabic art, profoundly influenced all Arabic literature. Early Arabic literature was predominantly oral, with poetry being a highly esteemed form. Pre-Islamic poetry, characterized by its elaborate meter and rhyme, dealt with themes like honor, bravery, love, and the harshness of desert life.

The Golden Age of Islam (8th to 14th centuries) marked a period of extraordinary cultural, scientific, and intellectual achievement. Under the Abbasid Caliphate, Baghdad became a center for learning, drawing scholars from all over the world. Arabic literature expanded to include prose, philosophy, and scientific treatises during this time. The maqama, a form of rhymed prose, emerged, as did significant works in historiography, travel literature, and autobiography.

Critical characteristics of Arabic literature include its emphasis on eloquence and beauty of language, the use of metaphor and allegory, and themes such as love, morality, and social justice. The tradition of storytelling, exemplified by the collection of folk tales known as "One Thousand and One Nights," also highlights the narrative creativity and cultural richness of the Arab world.

2.1. Historical Pathways of Influence

The influence of Arabic literature on Western literature is a testament to the rich cultural exchanges that have occurred over centuries. This influence has traveled through various historical pathways, notably during the Islamic Golden Age and the Middle Ages, and at critical locations of cultural exchange such as Spain, Sicily, and

the Crusader states. These pathways uniquely enriched Western literary traditions, philosophy, and sciences.

2.2. Islamic Golden Age and the Preservation of Greek Texts

The Islamic Golden Age, spanning roughly from the 8th to the 14th century, was a period of extraordinary cultural, scientific, and intellectual flourishing in the history of the Islamic world. It was also when Arabic scholars and scientists significantly advanced in fields such as mathematics, astronomy, medicine, and philosophy. One of the most crucial roles played by the scholars of this era was the preservation and translation of ancient Greek texts.

During this period, the Abbasid Caliphate, with its capital in Baghdad, became a melting pot of knowledge and culture. The House of Wisdom, an academic institution in Baghdad, was at the forefront of this movement. Scholars worldwide gathered here to translate works from Greek, Persian, and Indian sources into Arabic. This effort preserved the knowledge of the ancient world at a time when much of it could have been lost during the decline of the Roman Empire and the upheavals in Europe.

Transmission of Arabic Literature to the West

The transmission of Arabic literature and scientific and philosophical works to the West accelerated during the Middle Ages. This was facilitated by the expansion of the Islamic world into the Iberian Peninsula and parts of Southern Italy and through the Crusades, which opened up channels of communication and exchange between the Islamic world and Europe.

In Spain, particularly in cities like Cordoba, Toledo, and Granada, Christians, Jews, and Muslims lived together, leading to a significant cultural and intellectual exchange. The Toledo School of Translators, established in the 12th century, played a pivotal role in translating Arabic texts into Latin, making them accessible to the Western world. These translations included scientific and philosophical works and literary texts that would influence Western literature profoundly.

Critical Locations of Cultural Exchange: Spain, Sicily, and the Crusader States

Spain, Sicily, and the Crusader states were essential bridges for spreading knowledge and literature from the Arabic-speaking world to Europe.

- Spain: The Reconquista and the fall of Granada in 1492 did not immediately halt the influence of Arabic culture and literature in Spain. For centuries, the Iberian Peninsula had been where Arabic poetry, music, and literary forms were integrated into European culture, influencing the development of Western literary genres.

- Sicily: Like Spain, Sicily was a melting pot of cultures due to its history under Arab rule from the 9th to the 11th centuries. The island became a conduit for Arabic literature and science into Europe, especially during the Norman rule, when scholars translated Arabic works into Latin.

- Crusader States: Though often overlooked, the Crusader states in the Levant also facilitated cultural exchanges. Contact between European crusaders and Arab

populations introduced Europeans to Arabic literary and cultural practices, which were brought back to Europe.

These historical pathways of influence underscore the profound and lasting impact of Arabic literature on Western culture. The preservation of Greek texts during the Islamic Golden Age, the subsequent transmission of Arabic works to the West, and the critical locations of cultural exchange enriched Western literature and helped shape the European intellectual landscape for centuries to come.

3. Influence on Western Literature

The influence of Arabic literature on Western literature began primarily during the Middle Ages, facilitated by translating Arabic works into Latin and other European languages. The transmission of knowledge occurred in places like Spain, especially in cities such as Toledo, where Christian, Jewish, and Muslim scholars collaborated in translating scientific, philosophical, and literary texts from Arabic to Latin. This cross-cultural exchange introduced Europe to many aspects of Arabic and Greek thought, laying the groundwork for the Renaissance.

One of the most direct influences was the introduction of new literary forms and themes. For instance, European chivalric romance is similar to Arabic epic literature, focusing on heroic quests and courtly love. The frame tale structure of "One Thousand and One Nights" inspired European works such as Giovanni Boccaccio's "Decameron" and Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." Furthermore, the philosophical and scientific texts of scholars like Averroes (Ibn Rushd) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina) had a lasting impact on Western thought, influencing figures such as Thomas Aquinas and Dante Alighieri.

The influence of Islamic literature on European literature is something that some deny and is hard to acknowledge. However, the present day, with the evolution of freedom of thought, has made the impartial men of intellectual realization of both the West and East recognize the contribution made by Islamic civilization and literature towards the intellectual Renaissance of the world. This, in addition to the activity in comparative literature and their outcomes during this century, would highlight the considerable role of Islamic literature as part of our heritage and that the fruits of our civilization reached Europe, passing through the Dardanelles, Andalusia, and Sicily, which were from among the most critical pathways of the transmission of Islamic literature to the West.

Muslim rule in Andalusia for almost eight centuries enlightened various intellectual and literary aspects. By the 10th century, the Islamic influence reached every bit of Spanish life, spreading more throughout Europe as Toledo fell. The Islamic culture further penetrated the court of Alfonso VI, though nominally Christian in the 11th century. So, Toledo became a place that scholars from all over Europe visited, even from England.

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One of the most prominent exponents of tolerance for Islamic culture in Christian Spain was Alfonso X, the King of Castile and León, in the 13th century. He ordered many works taken from Arabic and Islamic sources to be translated.

Ignorance and corruption were in full swing within the rest of Europe, but the Spanish Muslims had built an upsurging civilization even through an organized intellectual life that contributed mainly to developing art, science, philosophy, and poetry. The outreach of their influence went to eminent Christian scholars of the 13th century, like Thomas Aquinas and Dante, which made Spain an example of enlightenment to the rest of the continent.

Europe flocked to Andalusia, whether for trade, pilgrimage, or knowledge seeking, and they absorbed the literature and science like a sponge soaks up water.

Besides, the Andalusians learned Arabic, and their Spanish language, with its Latin remnants, was instrumental in transmitting all this literature and science to northern Spain, southern France, and Italy.

In Provence, society is different, with customs, traditions, and contact with Muslims in Andalusia. It ruled for over two centuries, and under its rule, it left behind a legacy of science and literature that the Europeans wallowed in.

Sicily's history and the 13th century, especially, is the history of the reign of Frederick II, whose philosophers generally were polyglots and ardent connoisseurs of the Arab-Islamic culture. He indeed belonged to such sovereigns. He called many Muslim scholars and poets to his court and supported extensive contacts with the Islamic world.

During the Crusades, significant interaction was fostered between the Western and Muslim worlds, bringing with it, in particular, the import of much science, art, literature, and manuscripts into today's central European libraries and museums.

This interaction, and the contacts that have been established between our Islamic world and the West, have made the latter able to find, through the contacts and the search in the heritage of Islam, including literature, its fundamentals to renew many aspects of life, preparing it for the leading position that it plays these days, therefore contributing to the Renaissance in France and other countries in Europe and throughout the world.

As comparative research is done, they are making known to us more and more of our Islamic literature's influence on Western literature, enriching our century with research in that area. Its presence in some sources was highlighted by Miguel Asín Palacios in "Islam and the Divine Comedy," concentrating on Islamic eschatology as the source of influence for the work of Dante. At the same time, in "The Heritage of Islam," Alfred Guillaume and others showed its influences on several different Western literatures.

Islamic literature has influenced European literature not only in form but also in content. For example, whole genres like poetry have had the most significant impact, including Islamic eschatological themes in the *Divine Comedy* of Dante. The

troubadour poetry of Provence is also a mirror of the impact of Arabic-Islamic aesthetics and ethics.

Hence, it is no wonder that the influence of storytelling can be seen in such works as Ibn Tufail's "Hayy ibn Yaqdan," which influenced Western thinkers and writers, including the Spanish writer Baltasar Gracián and, possibly, the book "Robinson Crusoe" by Daniel Defoe.

The contribution of Islamic literature, particularly in the clarity with which it pursued Islamic content and themes of morals, had a powerful influence on Western literature, enriching it in many forms and contents.

"The Epistle/Message of Forgiveness" by Al-Ma'arri is one of the eternal masterpieces of Arabic literature, standing unique among all the masterpieces of human literature. It was written at a time in the West, the cradle of the modern novel, when it was void of any mentionable activity in narrative or any other significant literary activity, irrespective of the genre. Al-Ma'arri wrote this great work in 1044 A.D. at the peak of his artistic and intellectual maturity when he was over sixty.

Thus, this masterpiece itself derives its literary stature from the unique structure of its own time and the eras that followed, the novel and innovative subject matter, the imagination dominating in its artistic structure, its language carefully crafted, and the discussions and viewpoints literary, critical, linguistic, and cognitive that the book covers.

Because of its uniqueness and pioneering in narrative creativity not only in Arabic literature, "The Epistle of Forgiveness" needs serious studies. On the other hand, these researches legitimize and have a legitimacy of their own through innovations in narrative art and theories in general, criticism, and literary schools by any science or art that could throw additional light on this unique literary and cognitive work.

The Epistle of Forgiveness has been the object of many severe and extensive studies. All these studies have reached a saturation point for a time not negligible. New research in light of new perspectives and theories across all literary, critical, and practical dimensions will be a task to be taken up.

Among the studies "The Epistle of Forgiveness" has received are those that focus on comparing it with Dante's "Divine Comedy." Their hypothesis was then taken as the rise of these comparative studies: that Dante supposedly influenced in "The Divine Comedy," by "The Epistle of Forgiveness," from this hypothesis of his work's text being confused with the message. Strangely, Italian Orientalists from Dante's hometown categorically asserted this confusion in the preface.

3.1. The Importance of *The Letter of Forgiveness* in the Arabic and Human Literature as Well

After his "Epistle of the Angels"—perhaps the nucleus for "The Epistle of Forgiveness"—Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri wrote "The Epistle of Forgiveness" in 424 A.H.

when he was at the age of sixty and reached the top of his spiritual and professional maturity and intellectual. The letter belongs to the many included in the book (Diwan of Letters). Moreover, because of its length, it is, therefore, classified as a whole book by itself. The Epistle of Forgiveness is literature and art of the highest importance, disclosing the psychological world and showing the literary and linguistic qualities of Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri. In addition, the fact that it is classified among "the literature of the journey to the hereafter," finds an essential place in that literature, knowing its honor when belonging to "the literature of the afterlife" originated from the story of Isra and Mi'raj.

"The Epistle of Forgiveness," this literary masterpiece, is a symbolic answer to Ibn al-Qarih, who had written a letter to Abu al-Ala. Abu al-Ala made the protagonist of his story Ibn al-Qarih, who gets himself in the story by going on a trip to the refuge paradise, where he meets a group of poets, writers, narrators, and linguists and speaks with them. In this allegory, Abu al-Ala contrasts Ibn al-Qarih's life in the transient world with his life in the gardens of eternity, showing him his flaws, corruption, pursuit of pleasure, and debauchery wherever found, attempting through this to reveal to him the evils concealed within his rebellious soul, taking him from place to place. Utilizing this imaginary travelogue, Al-Ma'arri drew materials from the Quran, religious traditions, and the miracle of Isra and Mi'raj to solve many literary, linguistic, grammatical, and critical problems through this letter.

References to it are almost nonexistent due to the subtle way the letter deals with forgiveness and criticism of people's understanding of resurrection. These are points that scholars and researchers may be shying away from, possibly since the letter presents rather bold opinions on this account. Nor is its complex language and the obscurity of so many of its expressions to be counted in its favor to excuse avoidance and neglect.

"The Epistle of Forgiveness" is the oldest written Arab narrative text. Arabic literature knew varied genres of narrative (storytelling) literature prior to "The Epistle of Forgiveness" by al-Ma'arri: Between mythic stories, tales, parables, and famous epics, like "One Thousand and One Nights," the saga of Antar, or the travels of Sayf ibn Dhi Yazan, all genres of storytelling have been known to Arabic literature.

The stories of Arab lovers Hatim Tai, Layla, and Majnun, and Qais with Lubna, many more are marvelous adventures and related stories to the days of Arabs told in a tale form by Badi' al-Zaman. Each of these genres has its well-defined structure, specific purposes, style, language, and formulation, sharing the characteristics of being a text or narrative and bearing and artistic and intellectual features that distinguish them from poetry and other genres.

These narrative (storytelling) genres, existing prior to al-Ma'arri, are characterized as oral arts that have been documented. Hence, they are known as documented oral narrative arts. With the change of social and psychological driving forces in society, this kind of oral arts, flourishing in agricultural, pastoral, civilized

societies and communities distanced from urban life, then tended to decline and even disappear under the urban society, in which reading and writing flourish. Other written narrative arts and works start to spread.

Al-Ma'arri described his work as a "letter," later, historians said that it could be included in the same class of books that make up "long letters. Some of them also labeled it among the "Fraternal Letters" and Taha Hussein presented it as an "imaginary story." In contrast, Aisha Abd al-Rahman presented it as a "play." She reached the point of dedicating a book to explain her viewpoint, considering "The Epistle of Forgiveness" as a "theatrical text," and likening it to the scenes that were drawn about the journey of Ibn al-Qarih to the other world "to enjoy what he desired from pleasures, the abstainer of the age describes what he suffered from suppression and deprivation." Others spoke of the phenomenon of drama and epic in "The Epistle of Forgiveness," such as Salman al-Bustani, who indicated in the foreword to his "The Divine Comedy" translation that this is an "epic."

Thus, defining the letter as a narrative work resolves the dilemma of this difference in defining the genre of the letter, and this description protects it from objection, as it does belong to a narrative. A brief introduction to the narrative is beneficial to clarify the narrative feature in the letter further. The narrative is "a way of doing narrative action while putting these actions into focus as the intertwining constituents of events, conflicts, and the characters who imply meaning." Narrative is regarded as one form of expression. The content of the narrated is its content. Narratology is a science based on studying the narrative structure of discourse. It includes the roles of the narrator and the narrator. In other words, narratology is the science concerned with narration.

4. Second Subtitle Comparison Between *The Divine Comedy* by Dante and *The Message of Forgiveness* by Abu al-'Ala' Ma'arri

Dante Alighieri lived in Florence during the late Middle Ages, marked by political strife and religious scrutiny. His exile from Florence is a pivotal experience that profoundly influenced "The Divine Comedy," reflecting his journey from despair to hope.

Abu al-'Ala' Ma'arri, a blind Arab philosopher, poet, and writer, resided in what is now Syria during the Islamic Golden Age. Although known for his skepticism of religion and critique of societal norms, Ma'arri's works often emphasized rationalism and ethics, challenging prevailing moral doctrines.

4.1 Overview of *The Divine Comedy* and Abu al-'Ala' Ma'arri's *Message of Forgiveness*

Dante's "The Divine Comedy" is an allegorical journey through Hell (Inferno), Purgatory (Purgatorio), and Paradise (Paradiso). It explores themes of sin, redemption, and divine justice, with Dante's encounters in each realm as lessons on

human virtue and vice. Forgiveness in Dante's vision is divine, attainable through repentance and divine grace, guiding souls toward salvation.

Contrastingly, Ma'arri's approach to forgiveness is more grounded in humanism and ethical conduct. His skepticism of religious dogma made him emphasize personal responsibility and the inherent value of forgiveness as a virtue that enhances human solidarity and understanding rather than a divine decree.

4.2 Comparative Analysis

Dante and Ma'arri delve into the exploration of morality and the afterlife, yet their perspectives on forgiveness diverge significantly due to their cultural and religious backgrounds. Dante's Christian worldview frames forgiveness within the context of sin, repentance, and salvation, while Ma'arri's rationalist approach views forgiveness as an essential human quality that transcends religious boundaries.

Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri's journey to the afterlife is embodied in one of his most important works, "The Epistle of Forgiveness," a poetic epic in the form of a historical journey written by Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri (973-1057 AD) in response to a letter from Mansur al-Halabi, known as Ibn al-Qarih, in which he inquires among other things about history, jurisprudence, mysticism, literature, grammar, the prophetic biography, and heresy.

The letter serves as a definitive response from al-Ma'arri to his critics among the literati who accused him of heresy, atheism, infidelity, and following the Hindu Brahman religion, which venerates the spirit and abstains from eating animal meat.

Abu al-Ala's response to Ibn al-Qarih was twofold: the first part is imaginative, envisioning Ibn al-Qarih on a journey to the afterlife in the style of *Isra* and *Mi'raj* literature, but it's a petition to the Almighty for forgiveness for his past and future sins, seeking mercy for himself, Ibn al-Qarih and other poets to forgive their slips and sins. The second part addresses the intellectual, scientific, historical, and religious issues that troubled Ibn al-Qarih, offering al-Ma'arri's opinions, poetry, and knowledge.

Although Abu al-Ala directly reveals his stance on contemporary issues in knowledge, art, and science in the second part of "The Epistle of Forgiveness," the first part, the imaginative journey - believed to grant him eternity - also indirectly responds to Ibn al-Qarih's questions and issues, blending seriousness with satire to express his views and some doubts about the significant issues of his time. Ibn al-Qarih's journey, imagined by al-Ma'arri across three realms: the ascent, the visit to Hell, and Paradise, draws from *Isra* and *Mi'raj* literature and its primary sources in the Quran, exegesis, and Hadith in terms of the journey's framework, content, and details. Throughout these three realms, Ibn al-Qarih meets various figures representing poets, writers, critics, and thinkers, engaging them in intellectual, literary, critical, and religious discussions.

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Al-Ma'arri derives from literature, language, poetry, publishing, society, morals, and religion, the material that fills the framework of his letter. In al-Ma'arri's imagination, Ibn al-Qarih ascends to the heavens, visits the goblins' Paradise, moves to Hell and its torment, and then returns to Eden and the abode of eternity.

"The Epistle of Forgiveness," with its stories, plot, dialogue, and character drawing, is akin to a novel or a play where Ibn al-Qarih speaks to poets and writers, debating them on their sciences, issues, and knowledge. At the same time, Abu al-Ala imagines fantasies about Adam, Iblis, goblins, and angels.

"Dante's *Divine Comedy*" is also a journey to the afterlife in the form of a long poetic epic similar to al-Ma'arri's "The Epistle of Forgiveness." The Italian poet Dante Alighieri wrote "The *Divine Comedy*," which is known in world literature by this name. Dante began writing it in 1308 AD and finished in 1321 AD. The central theme of the *Comedy* is life after death, with Dante, unlike Ibn al-Qarih, being the main character. "The *Divine Comedy*" is divided into three parts: Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise. Dante called it "The *Comedy*" because it ends happily. Later generations added the adjective "Divine." Dante divided the poem's three parts into further sections called cantos, with Purgatory and Paradise having 33 cantos each, while Hell contains 34 cantos. A strong rhythm marks each section due to its cantos resembling the Andalusian muwashshah form with three lines.

In this poetic form invented by Dante, each stanza's first and third lines match the middle line's meter of the previous stanza. The story begins with Dante lost in a dark forest, symbolizing his sense of life's futility and the evil he saw in society. On a clear Friday, after a night of painful wandering, Dante interacts with the Roman poet Virgil, who promises to lead him out of the forest on a journey to the otherworld.

They enter Hell, a terrifying pit shaped like a deep cone inside the earth, with nine circles where they see crowds suffering torment inflicted by mythical beasts, demons, and other creatures as punishment for their sins. These tormented and cursed individuals are well-known historical figures, some from before Dante's time, though most are from his era. Dante and Virgil leave Hell, reach Mount Purgatory, and from there climb to illuminated terraces where the dead granted salvation seek forgiveness for their earthly sins. The atmosphere here is one of safety and hope, unlike the great suffering and despair experienced in Hell. Upon reaching Earthly Paradise at the top of Mount Purgatory, Virgil advises Dante to follow a new guide, Beatrice.

This epic, in many ways, is a love poem praising Beatrice's moral beauty and her ability to lead Dante to the greatest good; she guides him through the ten heavens, where he meets the blessed souls and ultimately stands before the supreme good, understanding life's ultimate truth and the universe's meaning.

European literary giants and critics unanimously acknowledge that Dante was influenced by "The Epistle of Forgiveness" by Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri, who preceded him by 264 years, adopting the idea and method. Both poets imagined poets in the afterlife seeking God's forgiveness for their great sins. They also portrayed the

historical reality of significant figures in their societies and cultures within a finely crafted and astonishing imaginative framework, just as "The Epistle of Forgiveness" appeared in the Islamic era for a long time before similar ideas emerged in works like Dante's "The Divine Comedy" and Milton's "Paradise Lost." The most substantial evidence of Dante copying the idea of "The Epistle of Forgiveness" emerged in the 20th century by a contemporary Spanish Orientalist when he found manuscripts of two translations of the story of Isra and Mi'raj, leading to a theory proving Dante built his Comedy on Islamic ideas and origins, including "The Epistle of Forgiveness" and the story of Isra and Mi'raj.

Despite their linguistic complexity and narrative rigidity, both "The Epistle of Forgiveness" and "The Divine Comedy" have left their mark on the literature of journeys to the afterlife and the individual's concept of heaven, Hell, and the afterlife. Modern Arabic literature still struggles to explain or facilitate understanding of "The Epistle of Forgiveness" by al-Ma'arri or to simplify the language in which the letter was written, another testament to al-Ma'arri's genius, who self-educated and denied his father's role in his upbringing, famously stating: "This is what my father has brought upon me, and I have not sinned against anyone." The influence of "The Epistle of Forgiveness" is evident in the works of Arab poets, as it inspired al-Zaha wi's lengthy narrative poem "The Revolution of Hell," Muhammad Abd al-Mu'ati al-Hamshary's "

5. Conclusion

Arabic literature is one of the world's richest literary traditions, reflecting the complex and diverse cultures of the Arab world. Spanning over 1500 years, it encompasses various forms and themes, from pre-Islamic poetry and Quranic texts to contemporary novels and plays. Its influence on Western literature is profound and multifaceted, affecting various genres and periods from the Middle Ages to the modern era.

"The Divine Comedy" by Dante Alighieri and the philosophical messages of Abu al-'Ala' Ma'arri, particularly regarding forgiveness, represent two towering achievements in medieval literature and thought. Dante's epic poem navigates through the realms of the afterlife, encapsulating themes of sin, redemption, and divine justice. At the same time, Ma'arri's work critically examines human morality, skepticism, and rationalism, offering profound insights into forgiveness and the human condition. This comparison explores the thematic intersections and divergences between these two literary giants, offering readers an analytical and informative perspective suitable for a scholarly audience or literature enthusiasts.

The comparison between Dante's "The Divine Comedy" and Abu al-'Ala' Ma'arri's message of forgiveness reveals a fascinating interplay between divine justice and human morality. While coming from vastly different backgrounds and

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eras, both authors contribute uniquely to the enduring discussion on forgiveness, offering relevant insights in contemporary moral philosophy and literature.

This outline serves as a roadmap for a comprehensive analysis, ensuring a structured and detailed comparison that adheres to the specified word count and content format.

In summary, with its rich history and diverse forms, Arabic literature has profoundly influenced Western literature, introducing new genres, themes, and narrative techniques. This influence is a testament to the deep cultural exchanges between the Arab world and the West, which continue to enrich both literary traditions.

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