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This research seeks to shed light on a writer whose literary works were met with rejection that was passed down through generations for a long period of time. That writer was the Sheikh of Ma'arra, Abu al-Ala. Discussions were limited to the wonders of his memory and poetry, and doubts about his beliefs, which were labelled as heresy and atheism. His works were only revived after the mention of Risalat al-Ghufran was linked to the text of 'The Divine Comedy' by the Italian writer Dante Alighieri, in a research paper presented by the Spanish priest Miguel Asen palacios, in which he attributed the influence of the Italian poet to the forgiveness of Abu al-Ala.

After this revival, Abu-Ala's literature received some attention and research, and Arab scholars gradually moved beyond criticising his beliefs, which had been the primary reason for the neglect of his heritage in terms of study and research.

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Between fairness and injustice

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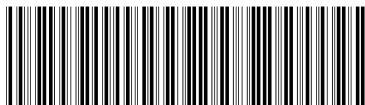


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Introduction :

If artistic prose in the Abbasid era witnessed development and reached a level of maturity and abundance that qualified it to surpass poetry by absorbing various innovative and translated knowledge at the time, those who have studied the abundant academic research devoted to poetry rather than prose believe otherwise.

After taking a closer look at this momentum that abounds in the literary heritage of the Arabs, it is noteworthy that the rights of a writer whose literary works were met with a rift that was passed down from generation to generation for a long time have been overlooked. That writer was the Sheikh of Ma'arra, Abu al-Ala, and talk was limited to the wonders of his

memory and poetry, and scepticism about his beliefs, which were branded as heresy and atheism. His works were not published until after the mention of "The message of Forgiveness" was associated with the text of "The Divine Comedy" by the Italian writer Dante Alighieri, in a research paper presented by the Spanish priest Miguel Asín Palacios, in which he attributed the Italian poet's influence to Abu al-Ala's forgiveness.

After this revival, Abu al-Ala's literature received some attention and research, and Arab scholars gradually moved beyond criticising his beliefs, which had been the primary reason for the neglect of his heritage in terms of study and research.

Despite the recent interest of Arab researchers in reading the text of the Message of Forgiveness, the

results of their studies have, for the most part, not gone beyond historical speculation, which is that understanding this creative work (Risalat al-Ghufran) does not go beyond the scope of influence and impact; as if this process of influence is focused on the Qur'anic text, specifically the story of the Isra and Mi'raj, not to mention its indirect influence on the text of the Divine Comedy, whereas this issue can be read within the context of contemporary critical approaches from multiple perspectives.

1- Abu al Ala's trials:

In the fourth century AH, Ma'arat al-Nu'man¹ witnessed political and social unrest that made it a battleground for sectarian strife internally and the Crusades externally, due to its proximity to the Roman Empire. This political turmoil did not affect Ma'arat al-Nu'man alone, but was a true reflection of the state of the entire Abbasid Caliphate, which had become fragmented into weak states, heralding its failure and decline.²

It was in these harsh circumstances that Abu al-Ala Ahmad ibn Abdullah ibn Sulayman al-Tannukhi was born in 363 AH. No sooner had the boy found his feet than he found himself exposed to trials that left a deep mark on his personality. Before he reached the age of four, he contracted smallpox, which severely affected his frail

1 - Referring to Al-Nu'man ibn Bashir Al-Ansari, the venerable companion of the Prophet, and Ma'arra Al-Nu'man, a small town in Syria near Hama and Shizar. See: Al-Hamawi, Yaqt: Mu'jam Al-Adiba (Dictionary of Writers), Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiya, Beirut, 1st edition, 1411 AH/1991 AD, Volume 3, p. 397.

2 See: Hussein, Taha: Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 8th edition, 1976, p. 55.

constitution and remained with him until he lost his sight. Yaqut says in this regard : "He fell ill with smallpox, which caused him to lose his sight in the year 367 AH"¹ This was the first of the misfortunes that afflicted this sensitive soul. The pain of blindness accompanied him throughout his life and remained evident in his personality, which was marked by numerous pains and misfortunes. Abu al-Alaa says that he could only remember the colour red, because he wore a yellow garment during his illness. ²

The second calamity was the death of his father in 377 AH, which had a profound effect on him because of the void it left in his life and because he needed his father more than anyone else. His father had never left his side, taking care of his affairs, fulfilling his needs, and protecting him from harm. He retained the fondest memories of his father's kindness and affection, for his

1- Al-Hamawi, Yaqut: Mu'jam al-Adaba (Dictionary of Writers), Volume 3, p. 397.

2 - See : Al-Rajkuti, Abdul Aziz Al-Maymani: Abu Al-Ala and Others, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiya, Lebanon, 1st edition, 2003, p. 34.

father had been both a father and a teacher to him in his youth, nurturing his body and mind and raised him, moulding him in his own image as best he could and instilling in him his morals and virtues.¹

Despite these successive trials and tribulations, Abu Alaa's passion for knowledge never waned. Rather, it was his only consolation in the midst of this alienation that began to dominate his thoughts, and it drove him to seek further knowledge. When he became frustrated with the lack of scholarly circles he aspired to join and the continued political strife, he set out for Sham. This is confirmed by Al-Qifti and Al-Zahabi, who reported that After learning from the scholars of his country, he travelled to Tripoli, where there were libraries of books. He passed through Latakia and stayed at a monastery where there was a monk who was knowledgeable about the sayings of the philosophers."²

1- Hussein, Taha : Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala, p. 120

2- Al-Rajkuti, Abdul Aziz Al-Maymani: Abu Al-Ala and Others, p. 55.

After returning from Syria, he headed for Baghdad, which was then the capital of the Abbasid Caliphate; a caliphate that was nothing more than a political shell, "but was in the worst state of weakness and division, with a caliph who was powerless, a king from the Banu Buwayhids who was unable to manage his kingdom, and soldiers who were in constant revolt and turmoil due to poor management, numerous ambitions, and a lack of livelihoods."¹ However, scientific life was at its peak. How could it not be? Baghdad was filled with scientific gatherings around the minister Sabur ibn Ardashir² and councils that never ceased in the sciences of language, jurisprudence and speech. In all this momentum, the blind man of Ma'ra sat with scholars and thinkers, debated with jurists and writers, until he reached a level that was matched only by the greats of science and literature. His passion for these gatherings prompted him to approach the council of Sharif al-

1- Hussein, Taha: *Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala*, p. 132.

2- Ibid., p. 132.

Murtada¹ , where he encountered something he had never imagined. Yaqut al-Hamawi summarised the incident in his dictionary of writers, saying: Abu al-Qasim entered al-Murtada's council and stumbled upon a man, so he said, 'Who is this dog?' Al-Ma'ari replied, ' , the dog is he who does not know the seventy names of the dog.' Al-Murtada heard him and summoned him, tested him, and found him to be a scholar imbued with insight and intelligence, so he welcomed him warmly."²

Al-Sharif's acceptance of Al-Ma'ari indicates his great admiration for him, which increased Abu Al-Ala's confidence in himself and his fanaticism for his intellectual and critical views. He did not hide his excessive admiration for Abu Al-Tayyib Al-Mutanabi and preferred him over Bashar, Abu Nawas, and Abu

1 - Abu al-Qasim Ali bin Tahir al-Murtada, leader of the Talibis, was an imam in theology, literature and poetry, along with his brother al-Sharif al-Radi. He wrote works on the Shiite doctrine and an essay on the fundamentals of religion, and he has a large collection of poetry. See: Ibn Khallikan: Wafayat al-A'yan, vol. 3, p.3.

2- Al-Hamawi, Yaqut : Mu'jam al-Adaba, vol.3. p. 406

Tammam. However, Al-Murtada was fanatical about Al-Mutanabbi and hated him. One day, Al-Mutanabbi was mentioned in his presence, and Al-Murtada disparaged him and pointed out his faults. Al-Ma'ari said: If Al-Mutanabbi had no poetry except his saying:

'O dwellings in our hearts, dwellings
That would be enough for him." Al-Murtada became angry and ordered that he be dragged out by his leg and removed from his council. He said to those present, "Do you know what the blind man meant by reciting this poem? Al-Mutanabbi has a better one that he did not recite." They said, "The commander knows best." He said, "What he meant in this poem is :

And if my detractors come to you, they are proof that I am perfect."¹

Al-Ma'ari swallowed the insult with great bitterness and suffered a third ordeal that broke his pride and arrogance.

1- Ibid, p. 406.

Abu al-Ala found himself in great confusion and hesitation between staying in Baghdad and returning to his childhood home after this serious psychological setback. In these harsh circumstances, he received news of his mother's illness, so he sacrificed his position in Baghdad in order to see her, but he only received news of her death as he was leaving Ma'arra. He could only reflect and say, "If I had arrived in good health and with eternal life, and found my mother already dead, I would not have rejoiced at my arrival. May God keep away any good that does not benefit the sick. That is all."¹ This thin man was burdened with his heavy load, and his misfortune was compounded by the calamities that had befallen him. He began to complain of his weakness to the Creator, saying, "Help me, Lord, and help me, so that I may be independent of my mother and father, for they are gone, and I am poor in Your mercy..."²

1- Al-Ma'ari, Abu al-Ala: *Al-Fusul wa al-Ghayat*, edited and annotated by Mahmoud Hassan Zanati, Dar al-Afak al-Jadida Publications, Beirut, n.d., p. 14.

2- Ibid, p. 31.

He had a tendency to withdraw and dislike the world and the futility of people in it. All this led him to isolation and seclusion in his home, cut off from people, calling himself "the prisoner of two prisons," meaning that he imprisoned himself in his home and refused to leave it. He imprisoned himself from seeing the world with blindness,"¹ As the days passed, bringing him more misfortune and increasing his pessimism, his prisons became three, which he described best by saying:

I see myself in the three prisons, so do not ask about the news

For I have lost my sight and am confined to my home, and my soul is trapped in this wicked body.²

The Sheikh of Ma'arra did not content himself with seclusion, but added to his behaviour a harsh way of life, forbidding himself to eat meat, animal eggs and

1- Hussein, Taha : Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala, p. 158.

2- Al-Ma'ari : Sharh al-Lazumiyat, supervised and reviewed by Dr. Hussein Nassar, Egyptian General Book Authority, 1992, vol.1, p. 297.

milk. However, although this recluse succeeded in his vegetarianism, he failed completely in his quest for isolation, because the fame he sought in Baghdad came to him despite himself, while he was exposed to it in Ma'arra. His prison became a shrine surrounded by students who came to study language and literature with him, and it was not long before they gathered around him in large numbers.¹

Abu al-Alaa remained committed to the rules he had set for himself, devoting himself to teaching and writing, until illness overtook him and he "died on Friday, the third—or, according to some, the second—day of the month of Rabi' al-Awwal, or, according to others, the thirteenth day, in the year 449 in Ma'arra."²

Despite this arduous journey that Abu al-Ala endured, as mentioned above, he never stopped learning and continued to study and teach in his retreat. Some of his students quoted him as saying : "I have remained in my

1- Hussein, Taha : *Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala*, p. 158.

2- Ibn Khallikan : *Wafayat al-A'yan*, Volume I, p. 114.

dwelling for four hundred years, striving to praise and glorify God, until I was forced to do otherwise, so I dictated things, and Sheikh Abu al-Hasan, Ali ibn Abdullah ibn Abi Hashim - may God help him - took care of copying them." ¹Al-Ma'ari combined poetry and prose in his creative work, so readers of Abu al-Ala's literature cannot limit him to poetry alone or prove otherwise. His fertility extends to his literature in general, and his bold opinions are scattered throughout his works.

1- Al-Hamawi, Yaqout : Dictionary of Writers, Vol.03 p. 418.

2- His most important works :

To get a closer look at Al-Ma'ari's literature in his era, this research briefly reviews the contents of his most important works that survived burning and destruction, and notes what was lost from them, because most historians agree that most of his books were lost after the Roman attacks on Al-Ma'ari. Al-Qifti says: "Most of Abu al-Ala's books were destroyed, but some of them were found outside al-Ma'arra before the infidels attacked it and killed its people." ¹

A- Saqat al-Zand :² is a collection of poetry on which Yaqt commented, saying : "A delightful book, containing poetry recited in the first era, known as the Book of Saqat al-Zand, consisting of three thousand verses."³ It is clear from the words of the author of

1- Al-Qifti : Quoted from: Al-Rajkuti : Abu Al-Ala and Others, p. 210.

2- Fallen spark: what falls from the fire when it is struck. Ibn Sayyida said : Fallen fire and its spark and its spark, what falls between the two sparks before the fire is fully lit. Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Makram, Lisan al-Arab, Dar Sadir, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1994/1414 AH, vol. 07, p. 316.

3- Al-Hamawi, Yaqt : Mu'jam al-Adaba, p. 422.

Mu'jam al-Adaba that Abu al-Alaa composed his collection before his seclusion, and at this stage al-Ma'ari was following in the footsteps of earlier poets, frequently mentioning beauty, departure and the loss of loved ones in his poetry. It is also noticeable that he often refers to past events, and he has a lot of panegyric poetry.

Al-Ma'ari undertook to explain "Saghat al-Zand" and interpret its strangeness, so he wrote a book called "Daw' al-Saghat" (The Light of Saghat). The book attracted attention after his death, and was explained by his student Al-Khatib Al-Tabrizi¹ and Fakhr Al-Din Al-Razi². However, Ibn Khallikan greatly admired Al-Bataliusi's explanation³ and considered it to have

1- Ibn Khallikan : Wafayat al-A'yan, vol.6, p. 191.

2- Ibid., vol. 4, p. 248.)

3- Abdullah ibn Muhammad al-Batliusi al-Nahwi - d. 521 AH. He was a scholar of literature and languages, well-versed in both, who lived in the city of Valencia, where people would gather around him and read to him. See : Ibn Khallikan : Wafayat al-A'yan, vol. 02. p. 282.

"fulfilled its objectives and to be better than the explanation of Abu Al-Ala, the author of the book." ¹

B- Al-Lazumiyat: This is a collection of poems that are not necessary, in which Abu al-Alaa, unlike other poets, committed himself to what he would not be blamed for if he left it out. This means that he made the rhyme based on two messages that he adhered to throughout the poem. He did not stop at this restriction, but made it based on "the messages of the dictionary, mentioning every message except the alif in its four forms, which are: the damma, the fatha, the kasra, and the waqf"², meaning silence. It is clear from this effort that Abu al-Alaa composed his diwan after his return from Baghdad and his confinement to his home in Ma'arra. Taha Hussein believes that this commitment was "Abu al-Alaa's motto throughout his life, after his return from Baghdad, as he committed himself in his poetry, prose and biography to things he had not committed to before,

1- Ibid, vol. 2, p. 282.

2- Al-Hamawi, Yaqut : Mu'jam al-Adaba, p. 421.

and he was not obliged to commit to them"¹. Therefore, the Lazumiya represents the truest representation of the maturity of Abu al-Ala's poetic and intellectual experiences.

In his Lazumiya, Al-Ma'ari turned to wisdom and social criticism, which is similar to Al-Mutanabi, but Al-Ma'ari's wisdom differs from that of Al-Mutanabi in that Al-Mutanabi's wisdom stems from a man who experienced the vicissitudes of life in pursuit of it, while Al-Ma'ari's wisdom stems from a wise thinker who knew life and renounced it.²

Al-Ma'ari resorted to ambiguous words and strange rhymes to adhere to what he imposed on himself in his collection, which contains eleven thousand verses of poetry³. This is not surprising for a man who made

1- Hussein, Taha : *Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala*, p. 202.

2- Al-Hakim, Suad : *Abu Al-Ala Al-Ma'ari, Between the Sea of Poetry and the Dry Land of People*, Dar Al-Fikr Al-Lubnani, 1st edition, 2003, p. 22.

3- Al-Hamwi, Yaqut : *Dictionary of Writers*, p. 422.

solitude his refuge from the tribulations that afflicted him in his youth and old age.

This ambiguity surrounding the collection was met with harsh criticism from some of his opponents, "for some ignorant people spoke of verses that were unnecessary, seeking to cause harm and injury."¹ This prompted Al-Ma'ari to respond with a book called "Zajr al-Nabih" (Rebuke of the Barkers). He then devoted himself to explaining the strange verses in a book called "**Ra'hat al-c-Lazum**" (**The Rest of Necessity**), which is "strong in its verses, well-structured, noble in meaning, and contains more wisdom and knowledge than the first book." ²

C- Al-Dara'iyat : This is a small collection of poems printed as an appendix to Saqat al-Zand, in which he describes the shield and the sword. Perhaps this interest

1- Ibid., p. 422.

2- Al-Jundi, Muhammad Salim, quoted from : Musa Pasha, Omar : New Perspectives on the Forgiveness of Abu al-Ala, 1st edition, Dar Tlass, Damascus, 1989, p. 24.

in the shield stemmed from his urgent need for protection from the vicissitudes of life in his early years.

D- Al-Fusul wa Al-Ghayat : Either it was the opinion of his detractors, who added the phrase "in line with the surahs and verses" to the main title, and among those who held this view was Al-Zahabi, who believed that Abu Al-Alaa opposed the Qur'an with it, and when he was asked, "Where is this in the Qur'an? He replied, "The mihrabs have not polished it for four hundred years."¹ This claim can be refuted in two ways : The first is that part of the book was printed after it was written, and it is clear from its content that Abu al-Ala wanted to present his students with the wonders and rarities of knowledge that he had learned. "He chose the best way to present this, which is to glorify God and give exhortations." ² . The second is that Abu al-Ala included in his book what refutes and invalidates this claim, in the passage where he says : "Our Lord knows

1 - Ibid., p. 204.

2- Al-Ma'ari : The Seasons and the Goals, From the introduction, p. D.

what He knows, that I have composed these words, hoping for His satisfaction, and fearing His painful wrath. Grant me what will satisfy You of these words and strange meanings. End."¹

- Either those who made this claim were completely unaware of the book *Al-Fusul wa al-Ghayat*, both in Abu al-Ala's time and later, The proof of this is what Taha Hussein wrote in his book "Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala" when he investigated the reason for the loss of his works, and confirmed that "Abu al-Ala had literary books that were lost, and history only knows their names, such as the book *Al-Sahil wa Al-Shahij*, the book *Taj Al-Hurra*, and the book *Al-Fusul wa Al-Ghayat*." ²

He then refuted this claim after reviewing it and explained some of it in his book "With Abu al-Ala in His Prison," concluding that Abu al-Ala was unique in his praise of God, "But he praises Him as a free man

1- Ibid, p. 62.

2- Hussein, Taha : *Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala*, p. 180.

who combines two contradictory qualities: he is free, so nothing prevents him from speaking to his Lord as a believer who is at peace with Him, confiding in Him what he understands and what he does not understand, and declaring to Him what he is satisfied with and what he is not satisfied with." ¹

Al-Ma'ari uses the term "goals" to refer to rhymes, because rhyme is the goal of a verse, its end. As for the book's content, it brings together many fields of knowledge, such as language, literature, prosody, grammar, morphology, history, hadith, jurisprudence, philosophy and astronomy. It seems from this intellectual richness that Abu al-Ala spent a long time completing it, and "it is said that he began this book before his trip to Baghdad and completed it after his return to Ma'arra al-Numan."²

1- Hussein, Taha : With Abu al-Ala in His Prison, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 11th ed. 1976, pp. 199-200.

2- Lahmouy, Yaqout : Dictionary of Writers, Volume 03, p. 418.

E- Al-Ayk wa al-Ghusun : This is a voluminous book, known for its hamza and radif. The author of Mu'jam al-Adaba counts its parts as ninety-two, and says that it is based on admonitions and condemnation of the world.¹

F- The Messages of Abu al-Ala : These are numerous, written under various circumstances, and classified by Yaqut in his dictionary according to the number of pages, into three sections :²

. Long messages : These follow the format of classified books, such as the Book of the Angels, the Book of the Sanad, Part, the Book of Forgiveness, Part, the Book of Obligation, Part, and so on.

. Messages shorter than these long ones : such as the Book of Al-Mani, and the Book of Al-Ighriz.

. Book of Short Messages : which is similar to what is customary in correspondence.

Although most of them have been lost, what remains has been printed in Oxford by the English orientalist

1-See : Ibid., vol. 3, p. 419.

2-See : Ibid., vol. 3, p. 426.

Margoliouth, with an English translation and useful historical and literary commentary and explanations.¹

G- The Message of the Angels is considered one of the most important books in which Abu al-Alaa used his fertile imagination to enter an angelic world in order to answer grammatical questions posed to him by some students. As usual, he did not give a direct answer, but began by apologising to the questioner for his advanced age and his lack of familiarity with grammatical matters. – as was his custom – to give a direct answer, but instead began by apologising to the questioner for his old age, his lack of familiarity with grammatical and morphological issues, and his proximity to death. He then continued the discussion by discussing the questions with the Angel of Death, citing examples from Arabic speech, then moved on to Nakir and Nakir, discussing their names, and digressing in his speech to a group of angels, each of whom discussed a

1- Al-Hakim, Souad : Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, Between the Sea of Poetry and the Dry Land of People, p. 23.

grammatical or morphological question, until he completed his answers to the questions in this strange context. Al-Suyuti quoted the entire message in his book *Al-Ashbah wa al-Nazair al-Nahwiyyah* (Grammatical Similarities and Analogies) ¹

H- Addendum : Written by Abu al-Ala in response to a message sent to him by Minister Abu al-Qasim Hibatullah al-Maghribi (370 AH/418 AH) ² Ahmed Taymur referred to it in a list of works.

Abu al-Ala says in its introduction : "Peace be upon you, O Moroccan wisdom, and Arabic words, O how delicate you are, and O how abundant you are, swift as lightning,

1- See : Al-Suyuti, Jalal al-Din : *Al-Ashbah wa al-Nazair al-Nahwiyyah*, Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, Beirut, Lebanon, vol.dII, pp. 230-244.

2- Al-Hussein bin Ali bin Al-Hussein, Abu Al-Qasim, known as the Moroccan Minister, the literary linguist, a poet, memoriser of the Holy Qur'an and, author of several books on grammar and language and many poems, the Abbasid ruler killed his father, uncle and brothers in Egypt, and minister to the state supervisor bin Bwayh, and Sultan Ahmad bin Marwan in Diyarbakir, See : *Ma'jam al-Adiba, Irshad al-Arib ila Ma'rifat al-Adib*, edited by Ihsan Abbas, Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1st edition, 1993, vol. 3, pp.1093-1105.

and precise as a needle..." ¹Abu al-Ala quoted from "Kashf al-Zunun" by Mustafa bin Abdullah, known as the writer of Halabi², and then quoted it in its entirety. The author of "Ma'jam al-Adaba" did not mention it at all.

Abu Al-Ala says in its introduction: "Peace be upon you, O Moroccan wisdom, and Arabic words, O how delicate you are, and O how abundant you are, your lightning is like thunder, and your precision is like rain..."³ And al-Ighriz, as stated in Lisan al-Arab, is: "A great drop that you see when it falls as if it were the root of an arrow, and it is from a broken cloud, and it is said: it is the first thing that falls from it."⁴ It is a short message, which Abu al-Alaa coloured with rhyming compositions and strange words until it reached the

1- Timur, Ahmad : Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, p. 67.

2-See : Timur, Ahmad : Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, Committee for the Publication of Timurid Works, Publisher : Anglo-Egyptian Library, 1970, 2nd edition p. 102.

3- Ibid, p. 67.

4- Ibn Manzur, Abu al-Fadl Jamal al-Din Muhammad ibn Makram, Lisan al-Arab, Dar Sadir, Beirut, 3rd edition, 1994/1414 AH, vol. 7, p. 196, entry (غ.ر.ض)

height of obscurity, as evidenced by his saying: I am sorry for your closeness to the Hijazi crowd, to the good man who left and embarked on a journey, so he presented the mountains of Rome in Nuw, brought down the birds from the sky, turned to his affection and was saddened and grieved, and left the mourning or forgot it."¹

It seems from the message that the two men were united by a bond of utmost sincerity, and I found in the writings of Abu Alaa what illustrates this most clearly :

"May God reform you and keep you safe. It was your duty to come to our empty house today so that we could make a covenant with you, O dear friend, for there is no one like you who has changed his covenant or been negligent."²

I- The Risalat al-Ghufran (Risalat al-Ghufran) : Al-Ma'ari wrote this during his period of isolation, along with his collection of poems, Al-Lazumiyat. Both are considered

1- Taymur, Ahmad : Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, p. 67.

2- Ibid, p.7.

important sources for understanding Abu Al-Ala's literary personality, as the Sheikh of Ma'arra reached the peak of his intellectual maturity and boldness in expressing his unique views. He "applied his strict philosophical law to his prose, as he did to his poetry and his life"¹ . Therefore, this research will use "Al-Lazumiya" as a guide to decipher some of the enigmas that constitute a barrier to understanding Al-Ma'ari's intentions in his opinions and ideas in "Risalat al-Ghufran" (The Risalat al-Ghufran), as it is the focus of discussion and the subject of this research.

The research does not seek to simplify the discourse on all of Abu al-Ala's writings, as mentioned in the introduction to the chapter, but rather to identify the main features of his legacy, open avenues for accessing the text, help unravel its threads, and present the most important readings I have addressed. In order to do this in a systematic way, the following section will be

1- Hussein, Taha : Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala, p. 218.

devoted to presenting the text of the Risalat al-Ghufran and highlighting its main themes.

3 - Dimensions of the contents of
the Risalat al-Ghufran :

Before delving into the content of the Risalat al-Ghufran, it is necessary to introduce the hero of forgiveness, known as "Ibn al-Qarih," for whom Abu al-Alaa built his heavenly journey.

The hero of forgiveness is Ali bin Mansour bin Talib al-Halabi, nicknamed Dokhla, known as Ibn al-Qarih... His nickname is Abu al-Hasan.¹ Al-Hamawi quoted others' accounts of him, saying: He is a scholar of literature whom we saw in Baghdad, a narrator of stories and a preserver of a large part of the language and poetry, proficient in grammar, and one of those who served Abu Ali al-Farsi in his house as a boy, then accompanied him and read to him, according to his claim, all his books and lectures."² He also studied under Ibn Khallawayh, as mentioned in his message to Abu al-Ala. It seems from reviewing the stages of his mysterious life that it was unstable, as he travelled a lot and "made his living from teaching in Sham and Egypt.

1-Al-Hamwi, Yaqut : Mu'jam al-Adaba, p. 1974.

2- Ibid., p. 1974.

He used to say that he was polite to Abu al-Qasim al-Maghribi, who visited Baghdad"¹ . This confirms his popularity with the Fatimids. For reasons outlined in his message to Abu al-Ala, the relationship between him and the Moroccan minister deteriorated, and he began to disparage and belittle him, "He had many faults, He disparaged him and enumerated his faults, and his poetry was like that of teachers, lacking in sweetness and devoid of eloquence."²

Ibn al-Qarih was not an unknown figure in the intellectual circles of his time. He sat with the leading scholars of his era and knocked on the doors of ministers and dignitaries. It seems that through his frequent visits to these gatherings, he gained the courage to discuss with Abu al-Ala matters of Sharia, literary, linguistic, and philosophical issues. He addressed him in his famous message, known as "The Message of Ibn al-Qarih," in which he hoped to trap the

1- Ibid., p. 1974.

2- Ibid., p. 1974.

Sheikh of Ma'arra in a slip of the tongue that would incriminate him with blasphemy and atheism.

Bint al-Shati'i prefaced the fifth edition of the *Risalat al-Ghufran* with an important introduction to the Message of Ibn al-Qarih, then reproduced it in its entirety. It is forty-seven pages long, followed by the editor's comprehensive commentary and biographies of notable figures. The usefulness of the message is not hidden, given its important role in reading the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, as it is a natural extension of it in terms of its ideas, because Abu al-Alaa, as will be explained, devoted the second part of his speech to responding directly to Ibn al-Qarih's questions and opinions, following them line by line until he had answered them fully.

Ibn al-Qarih made the minister Abu al-Qasim al-Maghribi the focus of his message, hardly moving on from talking about him until he returns to him again, as if he were recalling all his dealings with him, and his rejection of him was something that made him regret it.

In all this, he was sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit, attacking the minister with this and hinting at Abu al-Ala with that. From what he said about the minister : Abu al-Qasim was a tyrant, and tyrants may tire of tyranny, but he never tired of it, and he harboured the hatred of one whose heart never softens and whose resolve never wavers."¹ As for his allusion to Abu al-Ala, it was in the context of his talk about heretics and atheists, and he included al-Mutanabbi and Saif al-Dawla in their list, knowing full well the status of this poet in the heart of the Sheikh of Ma'arra, saying: But I am angry at the heretics and atheists who play with religion, seek to sow doubt among Muslims, and delight in slandering the prophets, may God's prayers be upon them all. They are clever and begin to admire that doctrine."²

1- Message from Ibn al-Qarh : Quoted from: Bint al-Shat, Aisha Abdul Rahman: Introduction to the Risalat al-Ghufran, Abu al-Ala al-Ma'ari, edited by Bint al-Shat, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 5th edition, 1388 AH/1969 AD, p. 61.

2- Ibid., p. 30.

He then proceeded to present a summary of the biography of the Prophet, peace be upon him, as if he were presenting Islam to those who had strayed from its path and become entangled in disbelief and atheism, concluding his message with his talk about the Sufis and their amusing stories.

Abu al-Ala received Ibn al-Qarih's message, and first of all, he paid attention to the sarcasm and insinuations it contained, and replied with a message whose essence was forgiveness, in which he elevated Sheikh al-Halabi to the heights of paradise. His heavenly journey included scenes of standing in the gathering place and the horrors that befell the hero. Then he had him wander through paradise to discuss with poets and linguists in different situations, his tongue uttering the words : "Why did God forgive you ?" and "Why did God not forgive you ?" Between the two stages of the scenes of Paradise, he approached the inhabitants of Hell out of curiosity to see the horror of their torment, and his awe of God increased for his salvation and victory in eternal bliss.

The Risalat al-Ghufran is a rich discourse that touches on several fields, such as linguistics, the history of poetry, philosophical doctrines, religious beliefs, and other interrelated fields that have previously attracted the attention of scholars. Therefore, this research seeks to examine the content of the message from different angles in order to reveal some of its dimensions, including its doctrinal, epistemological, and critical dimensions.

3.1- The doctrinal dimension :

Despite Abu al-Ala's prominence among the poets of his time, he was distinguished by his extreme reluctance to stand at the threshold of kings and rulers, and he guarded his tongue from anything that might bring him closer to them, especially after his return from Baghdad. He continued to closely observe the movements of society from his tower of isolation, renouncing all its pleasures, directing his criticism whenever the opportunity arose, and correcting what he saw as contrary to his principles and ideas.

Abu al-Alaa adhered to his own beliefs, which were in line with his personal nature, and this is evident in his *Risalat al-Ghufran* through what he wrote, a hint when he spoke about the fate of kings, tyrants, their wives and children in the gathering place, and some of which amounted to a statement, such as his talk about Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, the Umayyad caliph, and his call to his poet Al-Akhtal Al-Taghlibi in hell.

The scene of the kings is mentioned by Tamim ibn Ubayy when he tells Ibn al-Qarih about the horror he encountered in the reckoning, saying : The caller of the gathering says: Where is so-and-so, son of so-and-so? The mighty kings are dragged by the angels to hell, and the women with crowns are burned with tongues of fire, which consume their limbs and bodies, and they cry out : Is there any ransom ? Is there any excuse ? The young men of the Akasra children cry out in the chains of fire and say: We are the owners of treasures, we are the lords of the mortal world, and we had favours and helpers among the people, but there is no redeemer and

no helper! Then a caller from the throne cries out : "**Did We not give you lives long enough to remember, and the warner came to you? Taste, then, what is in store for the wrongdoers.** There **is no helper for the wrongdoers.**"¹ Messengers came to you time after time, and they gave you what was promised in terms of security. And it was said to you in the Book : "**And fear a Day when you will be returned to Allah. Then every soul will be compensated for what it has earned, and they will not be wronged.**"² But you were engrossed in your pleasures and preoccupied with the affairs of this world, so now the news has come : there is no injustice today, for Allah has judged between His servants."³ Al-Ma'ari singled out kings and their families in this scene, using descriptions attributed to them that belong

1- Surah Fatir : Verse 37.

2- Surah Al-Baqarah : Verse 281.

3- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, pp.247-248.

to the lexicon of tyranny or what surrounds it, such as: the arrogant, the tyrants, and the oppressors. He focused on one aspect of their behaviour in their defence of themselves ; They are accustomed to redeeming themselves with money, and they are the lords of the mortal world and the owners of treasures, giving and withholding, and spending lavishly on women with crowns.

Abu al-Alaa contrasted the image of kings in this world with their position in the hereafter, where they do not await judgment but receive torture from the angels, as if divine decree had been issued against them, and each of them knew his fate. The writer of Al-Ma'ara ends the scene of torment with the sound of the telephone saying, " "There is no injustice today," certain that injustice has an inevitable end, no matter how long it lasts.

The scene of torture in the gathering place is filled with wrath against kings without exception, as if political office equates to injustice and tyranny in all of Al-Ma'ari's work. Perhaps he wants literary revenge against

this class, and an example of this in his non-prose work is his statement in his *Lazumiyat* ¹

The rulers are demons ruling over all of Egypt, and the governors are demons.

When will an imam arise who will rule for us, so that generations and generations may know justice ?

Al-Ma'ari's intense resentment towards kings and politicians becomes clear when this torment and cry for help – in the previous scene – is contrasted with the image of Satan in hell, who is "tossed about in shackles and chains, and iron clubs are taken from the hands of the guards".²

If Satan, despite the magnitude of his crime and disobedience, is described in this way, then his crime cannot be compared, according to Abu al-Ala, to the crimes of politicians and their tyranny. and that the severity of their torment has reduced them to seeking

1- Al-Ma'ari, AbuAl-Alaa : *Al-Lazoumiyat*, Dar Al-Kutub Al-Ilmiya, 2nd edition, Beirut, 1986, p. 352.

2- Al-Ma'ari : *Risalat al-Ghufran*, p. 309.

redemption and help, in the hope that they may be saved from this physical torment that has afflicted their limbs and bodies. As for Iblis, he does not ask for anything from the bounties of Paradise, nor does he care about the torment inflicted upon him. Rather, he wonders in confusion about divine wisdom, the fate of children, and the ruling on wine. After this, he turns into a rational being who congratulates Ibn al-Qarih on his safety, and a pious man who rejects the craft of literature and earning a living from it. He also hates the curiosity and schadenfreude that Ibn al-Qarih displayed towards the people of Hell, saying: "I have never seen anyone more incapable than you, who do not hear what this speaker is saying that does not mean anything?"¹ , then he adds : "Have you not been forbidden from gloating, O sons of Adam? But you, praise be to God, have not been forbidden from anything except what you have taken up." ²

1- Ibid, p. 349.

2- Ibid., p. 350.

In contrast to this excessive indignation towards oppressive rulers and kings, Abu al-Ala calls on people to be patient in confronting them and to face dangers according to his method, the limits of which he outlined in his book¹ :

The mind that has shown you the way says to you : If you cannot ward off an enemy, then ward off his home

And kiss the hand of the offender whom you cannot reach. To cut it off, and see his wall cut down.

It seems that Abu al-Alaa made tact a reformist approach with which he appeased the oppressors to ward off their tyranny and preserve the state of rejection of the injustice of kings and tyrants so that its flame would not fade and its wind would not die down.

Abu al-Alaa moves from this generalization to cite the scene of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya in hell as a historical witness representing a life of pleasure and extravagance. Although he did not show him in his

1- Al-Ma'ari : Al-Lazumiyat, vol. 2, p. 359.

speaking character, he managed to highlight his behaviour through al-Akhtal, his poet who lived under his wing and knew his godless life.

Al-Ma'ari enlisted the help of the hero of forgiveness, Ibn al-Qarih, in his dialogue with Al-Akhtal, making him ask him : You erred in two matters : Islam came, and you were unable to enter it, and you adhered to foolish morals, and you associated with Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, and you obeyed your seductive self, and you preferred what is perishable over what is lasting, so how can you remain ? Al-Akhtal sighs a sigh that amazes the audience, and says :

Ah, the days of Yazid, I will have a place with him, and I will not be executed by him.¹ I will mix with him like a friend, and he will treat me with respect. How much he has clothed me in musk, I pull it in the morning or evening as if I were a singing bird in his hands, singing to him [...] And I have enjoyed it on some days when I

1- Sisbar : A type of basil, Persian. See : Margin of Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 247.

was drunk and intoxicated¹ [...] but it did not increase me beyond a smile, and it shook the connection like the vibration of a sword. He says, "May God grant him power," "Then you came, did you not know that that man was stubborn, and in the mountains of disobedience he supported? So what did you learn from his doctrine, was he a monotheist, or did you find him an atheist in his asceticism ?"²

Al-Ma'ari makes Al-Akhtal moan contrary to the reader's expectations, for he does not moan in pain from the torment of hell, but rather moans in regret for the days of the ruler who honoured him, brought him close, and gave him generously. With this scene, Abu Al-Ala reveals two important things : The behaviour of Yazid ibn Mu'awiya, who was accustomed to holding parties and drinking wine, and permitting all that was forbidden

1- Sukran Multakh : Overwhelmed, unable to understand anything due to confusion of mind, from TakhThe matter is : confused. See : Margin of Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 248.

2- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p.p. 347-349.

by religion. His poet, Al-Akhtal, testifies in his dialogue with Ibn al-Qarih that : "He liked these verses¹ :

O Khalid, tell me and announce your words, for I do not conceal my thoughts.

The words of Abu Sufyan when he named her Uhud until he established the Bawakiya

And how he wanted something great but missed it, and his grandfather, the happy Muawiya, bequeathed it to him.

And my people, bring me that coffee milked by Al-Eisi, the generous Shami.

If we look at old matters, we find that it is lawful to drink it continuously

There is no disagreement among people that Muhammad took up residence in the city of Thawya. On the one hand, there is the image of the poet who praises the caliph's biography to the general public and, After that, he was rewarded with the caliph's friendship

1- Ibid., p. 349.

and generous gifts from the Muslim treasury as a reward for his poetry and wit. There is no doubt that Yazid was only moved with joy when the poet tinged his literature with a colour of excessive frivolity and recklessness.

Through this scene, Al-Ma'ari attempted to express his indignation at the corruption of politics and literature at a time when the Islamic Caliphate had fallen into the hands of those unworthy of it. This resulted, in a later period—the era of Abu Al-Ala himself—in its fragmentation into weak states, whose treasuries were spent on luxury and debauchery, and the kings' ambitions were limited to a life of luxury and prestige, which did not protect the livelihoods of the general public or strengthen the nation.

Al-Ma'ari did not limit his criticism to politicians and writers alone, but also targeted another group that was no less dangerous than the others. He believed that religious sects were merely a cover for mischief-makers, that they had failed to fulfil their reformist duty, and that they had not taught people the practical truths

of religion and their moral goals. Instead, they made people accept worship as a meaningless duty, unaware of its dimensions and purposes, to the point that mosques no longer had any value in their hearts, which contributed to the spread of heresy and superstition.

Abu al-Alaa considered reason to be the foundation of knowledge, and through this preference, he attacked the supporters of tradition and indoctrination, calling for the fundamentals of beliefs to be presented to the mind, for he feared that "you will find a man skilled in industry, eloquent in thought and argument, but when he returns to religion, he is like a blind man being led, following only what he is accustomed to."¹

Abu al-Alaa mocks every imitator who does not use his intelligence and insight to understand religious matters, but takes them from others with dullness and naivety, thus falling "into the evil of belief, even if he deposits a trust, betrays it, and if asked about the testimony of Man, and if he describes a sick person, he does not care

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 463.

about what he says, or he has lost his burden, but his purpose is in what he gains, and he is affiliated with wisdom." ¹

Al-Ma'ari explains that the followers of religious sects pretend to be religious in order to deceive the common people and gain wealth. In his opinion, Yemen is still "a land of those who gain wealth through religion and deceive the poor by adornment [...] and that today there is a group, all of whom claim to be the awaited saviour, so that they do not fail to collect money, with which they achieve their base hopes."² And it is not only Yemen, but almost the entire Islamic nation that is not free from these fraudsters who strive to keep the general public ignorant, imitative and submissive.

Sheikh al-Ma'arra claims that most sects have not been spared from intellectual stagnation and have resorted to rigidity and dullness, including some

1- Ibid., p.465.

2- Ibid, p. 442.

followers of "Imamism." He believes that they "have drawn close to God through superstition, which some religious people consider to be a minor sin, and tyrants attend their councils, as if they were seeking guidance, and those people, God knows, are the followers of heresy and deceit." ¹ If heresy is a means by which some of the "Imamiyyah" achieve their goals, then Abu al-Alaa is surprised and sarcastic about some of the followers of the Shi'ah who relied on the narrations of "Imam Ja'far al-Sadiq"² about a man who apostatised and attacked their beliefs. ³

As for the Mu'tazilites, Abu al-Ala did not hide his mockery of them for condemning those who commit minor sins to hell, finding them most deserving of this punishment because they commit major sins as they please without piety or restraint. "How many pretend to

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 465.

2- Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Sadiq : one of the descendants of the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him, and one of the imams The second Ten. See : footnote Ibid, p. 467.

3- The man is 'Abd al-hbin Maimun al-Qaddah', who claimed prophethood and died around 260 AH, see : footnote Ibid, p. 467.

be ascetics, while they are in conflict with the transgressor, claiming that their Lord will condemn them to eternal hellfire for a penny or a dinar, while they continue to commit grave sins, fall into transgressions, and indulge in debauchery and immorality."¹

This behaviour was not limited to the followers of the sect, but Abu Al-Alaa confirms that he was told "about an imam of theirs who is revered and followed, as if he were a quarter ignorant, that when he sat down to drink, and the intoxicating drink was passed around, he would take the cup, drink it all, and make those present witness to his repentance for what he had done."²

Al-Ma'ari followed this sect with a discussion of the Ash'arites, who, in his view, were no less ignorant than their predecessors. For one of them "is like a broken shepherd, stumbling in the dark, not caring what he attacks with his sheep, falling into the pit, and how fitting it is that they come with their flocks, ensuring

1-Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 465.

2- Ibid., p. 466.

that all of them will come to pass ! Who is more deserving of punishment than he who is placed in darkness, except those whom Allah has protected by following the example of their predecessors and bearing what is prescribed for all ?¹

Abu al-Ala al-Ash'ari likened him to a naive shepherd who drives his sheep to barren pastures that have become a theatre for lurking wolves, and does not appreciate the magnitude of the dangers that surround him. He excluded from this description those whom God has protected by combining good following with the necessity of *ijtihad*, which breaks the shackles of sterile imitation.

If, in the view of the author of *Al-Ghufran*, the *Mu'tazilites* and *Ash'arites* are deficient and negligent as a result of their closed-mindedness and dullness of intellect, his opinion of the *Sufis* is no different. They are, according to him, people of heresy and falsehood, and the least that can be said about their sheikhs is that

1- Ibid, p.467.

they are closer to ignorance and atheism than to faith and certainty. In his opinion, al-Hallaj is nothing but a sorcerer, neither insightful nor pious, yet Sufis revere him, which is of no concern to him."¹

Al-Ma'ari attributes the status that Al-Hallaj enjoyed among his followers to their ignorance and dullness of senses, for they "await his emergence, and they stand where he was crucified on the Tigris, expecting his appearance."² They believe his words when he was crucified : "Do you think you are killing me? You are only killing the mule of Madarani, and the mule was found dead in its stable."

Abu al-Alaa, in a strange way, links al-Hallaj's words at his crucifixion with the doctrines of reincarnation and incarnation, seeing that what these doctrines have in common is the absence of reason in human beings and

1- Ibid, p. 463.

2- Ibid., p. 454.

their fondness for rumours and myths since ancient times. He is surprised by the words of some of them:¹

I am undoubtedly you, so glory be to you, my Lord

Your displeasure is my displeasure, and your forgiveness is my forgiveness.

Why am I being punished, my Lord, if it is said that he is the adulterer ?

Al-Ma'ari claimed that this bee leads to reincarnation, which is "an ancient doctrine espoused by the people of India, and which has become widespread among a group of Shiites" ⁽²⁾. On the other hand, Taha Hussein asserts that Abu al-Ala "knew about reincarnation and studied it, and referred to it in Sakat al-Zand, Al-Risalat, Al-Lazumiyat, and Risalat al-Ghufran. Reincarnation has been known to the Arabs since the late first century, and the Shiites believe in it, as do some other sects that

1- Ibid., pp. 457-458.

2- Ibid, p. 458.

are close to it, such as the Halwaniyyah and the Raj'iyyah."¹

Al-Ma'ari's sectarian affiliation is not clear from his indignation towards all religious sects, and it is difficult for scholars to determine his religious reference, as he makes reason his guide and imam. And believes that people of all religions and sects receive their religious principles solely through news, stories, and transmission, without intellectual research or effort² :

The mind admires, and all laws are imitated, not measured by a measure.

Jews, Muslims, Christians, and Hindus³

Despite Abu Alaa's fanaticism for reason and his making it the basis for the search for truth, his sarcasm made his opinions generalised and comprehensive, to the extent that their clear meaning was lost, and their meaning was obscured behind a veil that made it

1- Hussein, Taha : Renewing the Memory of Abu Ala, p. 268.

2- Al-Ma'ari :Al-Lazumiyat, vol. 2, p.28.

3- Rasais : Steadfast in their religions, previous reference, footnote, p. 28.

difficult for researchers to distinguish between his seriousness and his humour. He would say one thing and then argue against it at the same time, at least on the surface, and this judgement will be clarified in the following discussion of the epistemological component of the Risalat al-Ghufran.

3-2- The cognitive dimension :

The Risalat al-Ghufran contains a summary of Abu al-Ala's circumstances and positions, mixed with reflections on the various emotions they provoked : the experience of isolation and the suffering of blindness, his resentment of a society that had strayed from the path of true religion, and the decline of moral values to the point of recklessness and debauchery. Perhaps this is what prompted him to make the journey to the afterlife () the focus of the message, in which he describes scenes depicting the resurrection of man from his grave to be gathered with other creatures.

Abu al-Alaa was guided by the idea of the journey as a means through which he could present his views on issues concerning the universe and humanity in an innovative artistic manner. In all this, he relied on reason as the basis of knowledge, as mentioned above, to open up avenues for the concerns of Muslims, the debates of scholars, and the confusion of thinkers of his time.

Al-Ma'ari criticised everything that led to stagnation and the perpetuation of myths, and "deepened the approach of reason in an environment that based its sciences, literature, arts, laws and behaviour on tradition, presenting literature that was measured by the standards of human heritage and not by the standards of his nation and its circumstances."¹ He mocked the naivety of the common people in their belief in all the myths that were told, Perhaps this is what made him jump from hell to the paradise of the jinn with Ibn al-Qarih, to create a strange dialogue between him and one of the jinn, asking him questions that included beliefs prevalent among storytellers, who attributed verbal and physical miracles to the jinn.

Ibn al-Qarih asks the jinn his name, and the jinn replies : I am Al-Khit'aur, one of the sons of Al-

1- Nafea, Abdul Qadir : Al-Ma'ari and the Crisis of the Intellectual Poet, Al-Basair Magazine, a peer-reviewed scientific journal published by the Deanship of Scientific Research, Jordanian Women's University, Vol. 2, No. 01, Dhu al-Qa'da 1418 AH/March 1998 AD, p. 71.

Shayban. We are not the children of Iblis, but we are from the jinn who inhabited the earth before the birth of Adam, peace be upon him"¹ . Ibn al-Qarih then asks about the poems of the jinn, of which Al-Marzabani² collected a considerable number in his book "On the Poems of the Jinn." This is a reference to the prevalence of stories about jinn poets among literary narrators, and that what reached the inspired poets was very little. Al-Khit'a'ur confirms this by saying, "They were only visited by some of our most powerful jinn, who breathed upon them a measure of the poison of the arrak al-na'man."³

Abu al-Alaa artistically mocks the narrators' claims, which established among the general public the idea of the jinn's supernatural power in word and deed, especially their ability to transform from one form to

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 291.

2- He is Muhammad Bin Imran Bin Musa, AbuAbdullah Al-KatibAl-Marzban was born in Baghdad in 297 AH and died there in 384 AH. He was a famous author and a reliable narrator. See : Marginalia of Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 291.

3- Al-Ma'arri : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 291.

another. This method was represented by including a dialogue between the hero of forgiveness and Al-Khitour, in which Ibn al-Qarih asked the jinn about the secret of his remaining grey-haired, unlike the people of paradise. Abu Hadrash (Al-Khitour) replied, saying: 'The humans were honoured with this and we were deprived of it, because we were given the ability to transform in the previous world, so that one of us could become a snake if he wished, and if he wished, he could become a bird, and if he wished, he could become a dove. We were forbidden to imagine the next world, and we were left with our creation, unchanged, and the children of Adam were compensated by being in the best of forms. The humans used to say in the past world : 'We were given the ability to change, and the jinn were given the ability to transform.'"¹

Abu Alaa responds with overflowing sarcasm, mocking the jinn with human cunning, as if to say that humans are not without guile, and that through hypocrisy and

1- Ibid, p. 293.

falsification of the truth, they have been able to do what the jinn could not.

Through this dialogue, Abu Alaa moves on to talk about poetry, reciting a poem entitled "Siniya" in the voice of the jinn, in which he uses strange words to give it an air of strangeness that deceives the reader into thinking that it was composed by a non-human creature. At the same time, he allows himself room to showcase his poetic abilities, dazzling Ibn al-Qarih and captivating him with utter amazement with a poem consisting of sixty-seven verses. Taha Hussein supports this claim, saying : The Risalat al-Ghufran is filled with painful sarcasm directed at both the jinn and the angels. We have suggested that he composed the poetry in the Risalat al-Ghufran in the voices of the jinn who entered Paradise, saying that he only wanted to mock and ridicule them :

Mecca is stronger than the sons of Dardabis,
so what do the jinn have to do with it ?

It is a long poem filled with strange things, and it includes what is commonly known among people about the jinn."¹

Abu al-Ala did not content himself with mentioning stories about jinn in passing, but went on to mock the beliefs of the common people explicitly, considering them naive and believing false stories without the slightest doubt or verification. He went so far as to say that (the common people) believe that "if something is said, it is possible for it to happen, and that is why the common people say : Rumours are the beginning of the universe. It is said that the Prophet, peace be upon him, recited this verse but did not complete it :

Be optimistic about what you desire, for rarely is something said that does not come true."²

Al-Ma'ari deliberately mentions the false narrations attributed to the Prophet, peace be upon him, in order to

1- Hussein, Taha : Renewing the Memory of Abu al-Ala, p. 269.

2-Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 477.)

reveal how widespread they are among people and how they are transmitted without any verification or documentation. This phenomenon, in his opinion, became widespread "When Islam struck its roots and established its rule over the Arabs and other sects, and they heard the words of doctors, astronomers, and logicians, many of them were swayed" ¹ , Society produced models that followed myths and exaggerations that spread as a result of neglecting the effectiveness of man in the universe and his failure to perform his duties.

Al-Ma'ari does not believe that external influences alone make humans dull, but rather that it is also due to the corruption of beliefs, the severing of the bonds of monotheism, the undermining of the concept of divine providence and destiny, and the tendency to succumb to the whims and whispers of the soul.

In this context, Abu Alaa gives an example that illustrates the ignorance of the common people, when

1- Ibid., p. 420.

"some of them wanted to travel at the beginning of the year, so he said: 'If I travel in Muharram, I will be deprived, and if I travel in Safar, I fear that my hands will turn yellow.' So he delayed his journey until the month of Rabi', but when he fell ill and did not recover, he said : 'I thought it was from the spring of Riyadh, but it was from the quarter of¹ diseases.'"²

This dialogue is overflowing with sarcasm mixed with intense bitterness, which is concealed by Al-Ma'ari's language. Through it, he expresses his resentment of an era dominated by "suspicions and superstitions, and the loss of the controls that protect culture, intellectuals and writers from what is called the taste of the masses." The intellectual fell victim to this taste and succumbed to the general mindset of the public. It is a mindset that is contradictory, respecting the past excessively while being indifferent to it to the

1- Quarter Diseases : Fever (which) occurs every fourth day. See : Margin Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 482.

2- Ibid., p. 482.

point of ingratitude, sanctifying the past and ignoring it."¹

Through his forgiveness, Abu al-Ala seems keen to convince his readers of everything he believes in and calls on them to verify all historical data according to a logical path, because he believes that many of those who speak in the name of religion convey news by hearsay, and in this way mixing them with falsehoods, intentionally or unintentionally, so that they are no longer consistent with rational judgements and observable reality. This is supported by his statement in *Al-Lazimiyat* :²

"I have not written anything false, but rather the scholars and the news are false."

They claimed that men were like palm trees in stature and that their wives were like sparrows.

1- Nafea, Abdul Qadir : *Al-Ma'ari and Crisis The Educated Poet*, *Al-Basair Magazine*, Vol. 2, No. 01, p. 71.

2- *Al-Ma'arri* : *Al-Lazumiyat*, Vol. 1, p. 309.

Through these two lines, Abu al-Ala refers to a story spread by some narrators, which has become ingrained in the collective consciousness : that there were giant men in the past who lived for dozens of centuries, and then things changed for reasons unknown to the mind. Al-Ma'ari refutes these fabrications in Al-Ghufran in a rational manner, linking present things to the past according to necessity and inevitable causality. He believes that anything that is not acceptable to the present mind cannot have happened in the past, because the universal law is one and does not change with the change of things ; rather, things change according to it, and "all time is of one nature, so what Ma'ad bin Adnan saw is the same as what Naddad, the son of Adam, saw."¹

Abu al-Ala followed a single path in his literature, both poetry and prose, attempting to distinguish between the true mind, which is the effectiveness of knowledge, and the false mind acquired from society,

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 359.

which is a collection of knowledge accepted without examination. In order to purify the mind of this falsehood, the individual must examine these social data and analyse them according to logical proportions, thereby removing the intellectual rust that "stands between the individual and correct thinking and stems from the mind's exposure to falsehoods, assumptions, ideas and philosophies that accumulate on it like thick rust.". ¹

Al-Ma'ari was able to reflect the bitter tension between reason and tradition that Arab and Islamic culture experienced in his era. He rejected ready-made interpretations and called instead for the need to question freely in order to seek certainty and to challenge knowledge that relies on assumptions based on definitive truths, especially religious knowledge. "From here, he reveals what was suppressed in his era

1- Sheikh Al-Alaili, Abdullah : Al-Ma'ari, the Unknown, A Journey Through His Thought and His World Al-Nafsi, Dar Al-Jadida, Beirut, Lebanon, 3rd edition, 1995, p. 124.

and calls for thinking about what is not readily available to think about. He is a symbol of breaking away from sectarianism, whatever it may be, and from certainties, wherever they may come from." ¹

Through his *Risalat al-Ghufran*, Abu al-Ala sought to question all the concepts that were ingrained in the minds of the general public of his time. At the same time, he called for a bold approach to what was not discussed in religious, political and literary knowledge, but he did so in a way that made him fraught with ambiguity and paradoxes.

1- Adonis : *Arabic Poetry, Lectures Delivered at the Collège de France*, Dar al-Adab, Beirut, Lebanon, 1st edition, June 1985, p. 68.)

3-3- The critical dimension :

Abu al-Alaa took Ibn al-Qarih on a heavenly journey, during which he met most of the poets and linguists from the pre-Islamic era to the fifth century AH. He used this journey as a vehicle to express his views on certain issues relating to literature and poetry in particular. To achieve this, his imagination gathered these writers in various councils and lavish banquets, and he expressed this imaginary gathering by saying: It seems – may God support his glory – that he will hold a banquet in Paradise, bringing together as many poets as possible from the Green Age and Islam, those who established the Arabic language and preserved it in books, and others who are familiar with a little literature."¹

Abu al-Ala paved the way for the idea of gathering these poets and linguists, describing it as a mere desire that occurred to the hero of forgiveness. With this artistic stratagem, he was able to gather as many poets

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 268.

and those interested in literature as possible, from near and far, to make room for a wide-ranging discussion of the most important critical issues of his time. HeHe cites a range of news about poets and writers and excerpts from their poems and their rhymes, adding to them a dialogue that took place between the grammarians and narrators he presents, attributing it to the poets themselves and making those poets his reference, who settle for him what was disputed in the melody of their phrases and the accuracy of their words and anecdotes about their lives.¹

Among the most important critical issues that preoccupied the poets in Jannat al-Ghufran were the definition of poetry, its standards, the criteria for its quality, the issue of poetic theft, and the music of poetry. Among the most important issues that preoccupied linguists were some of the grammarians'

1- Al-Aqqad, Abbas Mahmoud : Studies in Books and Life, Complete Collection, Volume 25, Literature and Criticism, Dar al-Kitab al-Lubnani, 1st edition, 1403 AH/ 1983 AD, p. 118.

contrived interpretations, which, in their view, seemed questionable in many places. It was therefore appropriate to present their positions on hearing and analogy, and to investigate the eloquence of certain words in terms of structure and meaning.

In this order, the research will address the most important evidence found in the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, which dealt with these issues and identified the poets and linguists involved.

3-3-1- Definition of poetry :

Critics, both ancient and modern, have striven to define poetry in a way that distinguishes it from other literary arts. One of the most important definitions they have come up with is that of Qudama ibn Ja'far (327 AH), who defined poetry as : ¹ "Measured, rhymed speech that conveys meaning." The definition of poetry in *Al-Ghufran* is mentioned in the story of *Al-Hashir*, when Ibn al-Qarih tried to get close to the keeper of the

1- Qudama bin Ja'far, *Abu al-Faraj : Criticism of Poetry*, edited by Muhammad Abdul-Moneim Khafaji, *Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah*, Beirut, Lebanon, n.d, p. 64.

gardens of paradise, Ridwan, with some verses. The king asked him in surprise, "What are these verses ?" He replied, " Poetry is a collection of verses, and poetry is measured speech that is accepted by instinct on strips if it increases or decreases in meaning, and the people of the present used to draw close to kings and lords with it."¹ Abu al-Alaa takes the definition of poetry from what he confined it to "Qadama bin Ja'far" from being words restricted by meter and rhyme that convey meaning to a new definition in which taste occupies the foremost place, and the judgement of quality is left to the pure imagination and innate nature of the recipient, who discerns it with his senses. If this innate nature is tainted, the poetry's water will dry up.

3-3-2- Criteria for classifying poets in Al-Ghufran :

Abu al-Ala attributed the differences between poets in their poetry to two prominent criteria :

The first is the abundance of composition and the length of breath in it. The second is the preference for

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 250.

good composition and quality in poetry over quantity and length. He mentioned these two criteria in an interesting dialogue between two well-known poets, Al-Nabigha Al-Ja'di and Al-A'sha, each of whom defends his opinion. The first boasts, saying : "I am more eloquent than you, more expressive, and I have composed more verses than any Arab before me."¹ The poet Al-Ja'di believes that the quality of poetry depends on eloquence, expressiveness in language and meaning, and the ability to stretch out words. The second opinion, represented by Al-A'sha, differs from the first. He believes that poetry cannot be measured by length, because length prevents the poet from capturing elusive meanings and innovative forms, leading to vulgarity and banality. This is similar to a night woodcutter, as it prevents him from distinguishing between good and bad poetry, and leads him to resort to accumulated language that lacks scrutiny and refinement. If a long poem has these characteristics, it fades and disappears in front of

1- Ibid, p.229.

a single verse that is well-crafted and masterful. With these meanings, "Al-Basir" responds to "Al-Nabigha" saying : "A verse that I have composed is worth a hundred of yours, and if I elaborate on your logic, the elaborator is like a night woodcutter."¹

Through this amusing debate, Al-Ma'arri alluded to a critical opinion that was prevalent among critics, without mentioning its author, who was most likely Ibn Salam al-Jumahi, because his opinion on the ranks of poets² agrees with what al-Ma'ari mentioned on the tongue of al-Nabigha al-Ja'di in his saying to al-Asha : "Are you flattered that some ignorant people consider you the fourth of the four poets ?"³ Ibn Salam placed the following poets in the first class of the greatest poets : Imru' al-Qais, Nabigha al-Zubayni, Zuhair ibn Abi Salma, and al-A'sha. He then paused at the

1- Ibid., p. 229.

2- The editor of *Risalat al-Ghufran*, Dr. Bint al-Shati, made this observation, and research supports this by referring to Ibn Salam al-Jumahi's work, "Tabaqat al-Shu'ara" (The Classes of Poets). See the footnote on page 229 of *Risalat al-Ghufran*.

3- Al-Ma'ari : *Risalat al-Ghufran*, p. 229.

characteristics of each of the four poets and said of al-A'sha: "He is the most prolific of them all, the most skilled in the art of poetry, the most prolific in writing long poems, and the most skilled in praise, satire, and description."¹ As for al-Nabigha al-Ja'di, he placed him in the third class because he combines good and bad poetry, describing him in his classes by saying: Al-Nabigha was an ancient poet who was eloquent in the pre-Islamic era and in Islam [...] He is like the owner of two garments: you see him wearing a fine robe, but next to it is a coarse garment." ²

Al-Ma'ari's intention in presenting this comparison between the two poets was to highlight the Arab standard of criticism. In his classification, Ibn Salam sought to keep pace with the movement of poetry writing by compiling the opinions of literary figures and narrators who were connoisseurs of poetry, and he

1- Al-Joumahi, Ibn Salam : *Tabakat al-Shu'ara*, Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiya 2nd edition, Beirut, Lebanon, 1988, p. 53.

2- Ibid., p. 53.

attempted to scrutinise and verify the information. He classified poets based on the cultural heritage of his society and his own critical opinion.

Amidst this rivalry, the faint voice of Al-Ma'ari can be heard, believing in quality and detesting vulgarity and ease. His strictness is proof of his passion for this direction in creativity, as he excelled in setting restrictions to demonstrate his skill in good composition in both form and content.

To emphasise his strict stance towards those poets who violated the rules of this art, Al-Ma'ari resorted to an artistic device in which he had the hero of forgiveness "pass by verses that do not have the loftiness of the verses of Paradise, and when he asks about them, he is told: 'This is the Paradise of the Rujaz.'¹ Despite Abu al-Ala al-Rujaz's entry into paradise, he distinguished them by the shortness of their houses. This is a deliberate act of mockery and contempt, for they are in a paradise of bliss with many palaces, yet they find only

1- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 373.

these small houses. He equates the insignificance of their reward with the inferiority of their poetry, and believes that this type of poetry is covered by the hadith narrated from the Messenger of Allah, peace be upon him: "Allah loves the noble and hates the trivial; and the ragaz is for the trivial poet" (¹). Its composers do not rise to the rank of the great poets. One of the most amusing examples of their condemnation in Al-Ghufran is Ibn al-Qarih's mockery of Ru'bah ibn Al-Ajaj when he said : "If your rhymes and your father's rhymes were combined, they would not produce a poem worthy of praise, [...] and you have been receiving the rewards of kings without deserving them, for others are more deserving of gifts and praise."²

At first glance, it seems that Abu al-Ala's mockery is directed at the poet Ru'ba and his ilk, as they receive gifts for their poetry, but this is a slight to the good taste of those who spent their money on them and enjoyed

1- Ibid., p. 375.

2- Ibid, p.p. 375-376.

listening to their poetry. Using poetry as a means of earning a living also diminishes the poet's status in Abu Alaa's paradise, as poetry, in his view, is a moral message to which its author is committed.

Abu al-Alaa linked the quality of poetry to the purity of intention and the nobility of purpose. He found in this a golden opportunity to trap the hero of his forgiveness in a trap of vulgarity and triviality, when he (Ibn al-Qarih) allowed himself to beg the guardians of paradise, "Ridwan" and "Zafar," with verses of poetry he had composed in their praise in exchange for them opening the gates of paradise for him to enter. They rejected his words and sent him away disappointed. What made Ibn al-Qarih even more despicable and a subject of ridicule was his declaration of his misery in this world and the stinginess of those whom he had approached with his politeness.

He said : "I have suffered in this world by gathering politeness, and I have gained nothing from it, but I used it to approach the leaders, and they milked me dry and

exhausted my descendants." ¹ That is, to covet the bounty of a leader is like coveting milk from a stingy camel ² . Abu al-Ala confirms the same meaning elsewhere, in the context of Ibn al-Qarih's conversation with "Iblis" in Hell, who asks him, "Who is this man ?" Ibn al-Qarih replies, " I am so-and-so, son of so-and-so, from Aleppo. My profession was literature, with which I sought to ingratiate myself with kings ! He says : What a wretched profession ! It provides a meagre livelihood that is not enough to support a family, and it is a stumbling block and has destroyed many like you ! Congratulations on your survival, for you deserve it ! ³ The accursed Satan curses the craft of Ibn al-Qarih, seeing it as providing its practitioner with a meagre livelihood and hardship for those he supports. More dangerous than that is that it brings its practitioner regret in this world and the next, and few escape its pitfalls.

1- Ibid, pp. 292-293.

2- See : Risalat al-Ghufran, margin p. 293.

3- Ibid., p. 309.

3-3-3- Abu al-Ala's stance on poetry reciters :

In his message to Al-Ma'ari, Ali bin Mansour demonstrated his ability to recite poetry and quote narrators and critics. Abu Al-Ala did not want to deprive him of this gift, as he was the hero of the heavenly journey, so he made him the most knowledgeable inhabitant of Paradise and Hell. He took pride in this and thanked God for it, and it reached the point where many poets marvelled at his memory, which was free from forgetfulness, and his strong memory. Among those poets who were impressed by him was Tamim bin Abi, who expressed his amazement by saying : "Your memory remains intact, as if you did not witness the horrors of the reckoning."¹ Al-Shamakh bin Darar al-Dhubiani also marvelled at how his memory remained intact despite the horrors of the gathering that would cause every nursing woman to forget her infant and every pregnant woman to miscarry. He said : "You witnessed the situation, so it is surprising

1- Ibid, p. 246.

that you still have some of your memory ! The sheikh [Ibn al-Qarih] said : "I used to pray sincerely after my prayers, before I moved from that house, that God would grant me my request in this world and the hereafter, and He answered my prayer, praise be to Him."¹

Abu al-Alaa relied on Ibn al-Qarih's memory to drive the dialogue between the characters in *Al-Ghufran*, making it a vessel through which he displays his literary repertoire, including his views on poetry and criticism, and various linguistic opinions. On the one hand, he made him a subject of ridicule when he displayed ignorance and naivety, and on the other hand, he made him a subject of ridicule when he displayed ignorance and naivety. Seriousness and humour are intertwined in the text of *Al-Ghufran*, separated only by a thin veil that causes confusion between them. The reader finds that

1- *Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran*, p. 241.

the Sheikh of Ma'arra sometimes elevates Ibn al-Qarih and sometimes demeans him.

Al-Ma'arri presents Ibn al-Qarih as a storyteller who recounts stories without verification or control, thus falling prey to ridicule and accusations from poets, most notably his encounter with the Prophet Adam, peace be upon him. A witty dialogue ensues between them, as Ibn al-Qarih asks about a poem attributed to the father of humanity, saying : "O our father, may God bless you, we have heard a poem attributed to you, in which you say :

We are the children of the earth and its inhabitants
We were created from it, and to it we shall return

Happiness does not remain with its owners,
and misfortune erases it with the nights of Saud.

Adam, peace be upon him, replied in amazement : "This saying is true, and only some wise men have uttered it, but I have not heard it until now." ¹However, Ibn al-

1- Ibid, p. 360.

Qarih insists on the truth of the story and explains Adam's denial of it by his well-known forgetfulness. He seeks to provide evidence to convince him, and Adam responds angrily : "You have nothing but disobedience and harm ! I used to speak Arabic when I was in Paradise, but when I descended to earth, my tongue was changed to Syriac, and I spoke nothing else until I died. When God, Glorious and Exalted, returned me to Paradise, my Arabic returned. So when did I compose this poetry : in the near future or the distant future ? Whoever said that must have said it while in the House of Deception. ¹

Ibn al-Qarih appears in this scene as persistent, stubborn, and disrespectful to the father of humanity, Adam, peace be upon him, especially when he provoked him by mentioning another story in which he says : "And so they say, peace be upon you, when Cain killed Abel :

1- Ibid., p. 362.

The land changed, and those upon it, and the face of the earth became dusty and ugly.

And a quarter of its people perished, and they were buried in the salty earth.¹

The son of Al-Qarh went too far in angering the father of humanity, which led him to hear a response to his abuse, a rebuttal of his claims and falsehoods. Adam, peace be upon him, said to him : "I honour you, O people of my father ! You are misguided and deluded ! I did not utter this poem, nor was it uttered in my time, but rather it was composed by some idle people. There is no power and no strength except with Allah ! You have lied about your Creator and your Lord, then about Adam, your father, then about Eve, your mother, and some of you have lied about each other, and your end in that is the earth."²

Abu al-Ala did not mean Ibn al-Qarih in particular with this response, but rather directed his criticism at a

1- Ibid., p. 362.

2- Ibid, p. 364.

group of exegetes who relied on traditional interpretation, and who cited various narrations whose authenticity and textual attribution were not examined until much later. This school of thought was led by Muhammad ibn Jarir al-Tabari (d. 310 AH), who was followed by al-Hafiz ibn Kathir (d. 774 AH) and Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti (d. 911 AH) followed him.

Al-Tabari quoted the two verses attributed to Adam (peace be upon him) from a narration by Ali ibn Abi Talib (may Allah honour his face) without comment or commentary¹. Meanwhile, Jarallah al-Zamakhshari (467 AH/538 AH) questions the authenticity of attributing these verses to the Prophet Adam, peace be upon him, saying: "It is narrated that Adam remained without laughter for a hundred years after the killing of his son and that he mourned him with poetry, which is a complete lie, for poetry is nothing but metaphor and rhyme, and it is true that prophets are immune from

1- See : Al-Tabari, Abu Ja'far Muhammad ibn Jarir : Jami' al-Bayan fi Tafsir al-Qur'an, Dar al-Ma'rifah, Beirut, Lebanon, 1412 AH/1992 AD, vol. 4, p. 122.

poetry."¹ This statement was confirmed by Imam Al-Alusi (d. 1270 AH) in his interpretation, where he says : "It was narrated from Maimun ibn Mahran from Al-Khabr ibn Abbas, may Allah be pleased with him, that he said : Whoever says that Adam, peace be upon him, recited poetry has lied. Muhammad, peace be upon him, and all the prophets are equally forbidden from poetry."² The prohibition refers to the words of Allah : **"We have not taught him poetry, nor is it befitting for him. It is nothing but a reminder and a clear Qur'an."**³

These opinions, which agree with those of Abu al-Ala, are summarised by Muhammad ibn Muhammad Abu Shahba in his book *Al-Israiliyat wa al-Mawdu'at fi*

1- Al-ZamakhshariAl-KhawarizmiAbu al-Qasim Jarallah Mahmoud bin Omar : *Al-Kashaf 'an Haqa'iq al-Tanzil wa 'Uyun al-Aqwal fi Wujuh al-Ta'wil*, Mustafa al-Babi al-Halabi and Sons Publishing House, Egypt, latest edition, 1392 AH/1972 AD, vol. 1, p. 608.

2- Al-Alusi al-Baghdadi, Abu al-Fadl Shihab al-Din al-Sayyid Mahmoud : *Ruh al-Ma'ani fi Tafsir al-Qur'an al-Azimand al-Sab'ahal-Mithani*, edited by Professor Sayyid Imran, Dar al-Hadith, Cairo, edition 1426 AH/2005 AD, Volume 3, p. 402.

3- Surah Yasin : Verse 69.

Kutub al-Tafsir (Israeli Stories and Fabrications in the Books of Exegesis), in which he argues that this poetry is fabricated and "extremely poor, and most likely an Israeli fabrication, with only a small amount of Arabic in it, or a storyteller who wants to win people's hearts with such nonsense."¹

With these opinions expressed in the text of Al-Ghufran, Abu Al-Alaa was quick to challenge the authenticity of this plagiarised poetry, boldly, using his intellect and enlightened by his literary talents, before many established exegetes. He stated in his forgiveness, through the words of Adam, peace be upon him, without hesitation : "You have lied to Adam, your father..."²

Abu al-Ala did not content himself with Abu al-Bashir's stance on the narration of poetry, but had Ibn al-Qarih go around to the poets and raise many issues

1- Abu shahba, Muhammad ibn Muhammad : Israiliyyat and Topics in Tafsir Books, Maktabat al-Sunnah, Dar al-Salafiyyah li-Nashr al-'Ilm, Cairo, Egypt, 4th edition, 1408 AH, p. 184.

2- Al-Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p. 364.

discussed in books of poetry criticism in the section on plagiarism, including what was attributed to Imru' al-Qais from poetry that the narrators misquoted, and he refuted the narration himself, saying: May God remove those people! They have misrepresented the narration, and if they have done so, what is the difference between composition and poetry ? This is something done by those who have no instinct for knowing the weight of poetry, so those who came later thought it was originally composed, but far from it !" ¹

Then, later in his dialogue with Ibn al-Qarih, Imru' al-Qais comments on the verses attributed to him, saying : "No, by God, I have never heard this, and it is a village I have never visited, and there are many lies, and I think this is the work of some of the poets of Islam, and they have wronged me and done me an injustice."²

There are many examples in the text of Al-Ghufran in which Abu Al-Ala expresses his clear position on the

1- Ibid, p. 314.

2- Ibid., p. 319.

narrators of poetry, who excel in plagiarising poetry and spreading false and fabricated stories without the slightest verification or recourse to a scientific method that satisfies reason and sound taste.

4 - The reading of Al-Ghufran by later generations :

As mentioned above, the literature of Abu al-Alaa was severely rejected by his contemporaries and their followers until the beginning of the 20th century, and remained banned for centuries. Discussions of its content were limited to criticism of its beliefs, while its form was completely ignored.¹

In the modern era, at the end of the nineteenth century, the emergence of the Risalat al-Ghufran was associated with the English orientalist Nicholson, who presented it to the Western world in the Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society². In 1917, the Spanish orientalist Miguel Asin Palacios shook the literary world in Europe with his theory that the Italian Dante took the fictional material for his Divine Comedy from Arabic sources, foremost among which were the story of the Mi'raj and the Risalat al-Ghufran. This

1- See: Al-Hajj, Muhammad Mustafa: The Poetry of Abu al-Ala among the Ancients, p. 35.

2- See: Bint al-Shati, Aisha Abd al-Rahman: New in Risalat al-Ghufran, a theatrical text from the fifth century AH, Dar al-Kitab al-Arabi, Beirut, 1403 AH-1983 AD, p. 9.

theory occupied scholars in the field of influence and influence in comparative literature.¹

The publication of *The Risalat al-Ghufran* sparked a heated debate, with many Westerners refuting Plathius's claims. while Arab scholars viewed it positively, turning their attention to a literary work that had been hidden from them for a long time, during which literary historians were preoccupied with discussing the beliefs of its author, thereby tempting subsequent generations to reject it.

3-1. Taha Hussein's reading of the *Risalat al-Ghufran*:
Taha Hussein took the first initiative in re-reading Al-Alawi's discourse in general, and in 1914 he submitted his research paper "Renewing the Memory of Abu Al-Ala" to the Egyptian University to obtain a master's degree and the title of Doctor of Literature.

Taha Hussein relied on the historical method in his research, so he only mentioned the *Risalat al-Ghufran*

1- See: *Ibid.*, p. 9.

in passing. Through the method he followed, he classified the literature of Abu al-Ala according to its chronological stages into two phases:

The first stage represents Abu al-Ala's youth, before his seclusion, and he believes that the prominent feature of his poetry was that it was contrived and lacked strength, explaining this by saying: "His words were often affected when he was keen to show his superiority and mastery, as if he were dictating his inclination towards genius."¹ As for his prose, its affectation was evident in its rhymes and strange expressions.²

As for the second phase, it represents his isolation. Taha Hussein believes that the difference between the two phases lies in the fact that Abu al-Alaa distinguished himself in the second phase by his tendency to "hide himself from the reader in some of his messages, but his personality refused to remain hidden. He erected

1- Hussein, Taha: *Renewal Memories of Abu Alaa*, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 8th edition, 1976, p. 214.

2- Ibid., p.214.

impenetrable walls between himself and the reader using linguistic investigations and religious imagery, but his sincere emotions refused to be held back by these barriers, reaching the reader and leaving scars, like embers that are less painful and easier to bear."¹

Taha Hussein alludes to the evasiveness that Abu al-Ala adopted in presenting his views, almost concealing them behind a thick veil of strange words that prevented the general public from reading them, and inventing characters to serve as a bridge through which to convey his message. "How many pre-Islamic poets did he take as soldiers to defend him and fight for him, how much did he adorn himself with linguistic knowledge to protect him from the stigma of atheism, and how many Abbasid heretics did he sacrifice as victims to declare that he was a Muslim? But all this scheming only increased people's awareness of him and their accusations against him."² Abu al-Ala did not content

1- Ibid., p.p. 217–218.

2- Ibid., p. 218.

himself with taking these figures as his vehicle, but devoted himself in his forgiveness to "complete investigation, so that if a linguistic or grammatical question arose in his path, he could not turn away from it until he had investigated it. The people of Paradise and Hell, who were poets and storytellers, were greatly distressed by him, because he constantly criticised and debated with them." ¹

When Taha Hussein found a stylistic discrepancy between the first section of the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, which includes the journey, and the second section, which constitutes a direct response to Ibn al-Qarih's message, "As for the description of Paradise and its bliss, or Hell and its torment, the rhymes are necessary, and the strange elements are abundant. As for the description of the heretics, it is easy to convey and does not deviate from the norm."²

1- Ibid, p. 218.

2- Ibid, p. 219.

Taha Hussein then went beyond style to examine the content of the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, seeking points of criticism. He found that its author relied on a strong talent for criticising people's customs and morals, but that he "took the path of sarcasm in his criticism, and was therefore very harsh and scathing with his opponents."¹ Through his sarcasm, he was able to convince his audience that he had reached the height of seriousness in his speech and that they had triumphed, according to Taha Hussein in one of the most authoritative books on religion, except that he took "a hidden path, almost beyond imagination. Had his historians not misjudged him, they would not have been guided by the criticism in the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, for they understood only what was apparent and explicit, such as the obscene poems he narrated about some heretics, but they rarely understood his own criticism."²

1- Hussein, Tahab: *Renewal* Memories of Abu Alaa, p. 220.

2- Ibid, p. 221.

As for Taha Hussein's position on the element of imagination in *Al-Ghufran*, he almost dismisses it, claiming that Abu Al-Ala did not invent "much in the message, but rather included the stories of the preachers with most of what they contained. If there is anything in the message, it is coordination and sarcasm."¹ No sooner had Taha Hussein made this judgement than he contradicted himself later on, finally deciding that "this message is the first work of fiction among the Arabs."²

3-2. Al-Aqqad's reading of the *Risalat al-Ghufran* :

In another study, Abbas Mahmoud Al-Aqqad examined the chapters of *The Risalat al-Ghufran*, and his research led him to the same conclusion as Taha Hussein. He affirmed that "the truth about this message is that it is a work of literature and history and the fruit of study and research, not an artistic innovation or an

1- Ibid, p. 223.

2- Ibid, p. 224.

innovative analysis." ¹ And if Al-Ghufran does not occupy a place among works of art—in his view—he believes that it is nothing more than a presentation of " of a collection of news about poets and excerpts from their poems and rhymes, to which he adds a dialogue that took place between the grammarians and narrators he presents, attributing it to the poets themselves and making those poets his reference, who settle for him the disputes over the melody of their phrases, the accuracy of their words, and the anecdotes theyHe resolved their differences and taught them his judgement on what he considered to be right or wrong in the statements of the critics and narrators.²

Al-Aqqad sought to support this opinion with a series of arguments, in which he considered that Abu al-Ala did not deviate from what people commonly believed about

1- Al-Aqqad, Abbas Mahmoud: Studies in Books and Life, Complete Collection, Volume 25 - Literature and Criticism - Dar Al-Kitab Al-Lubnani, 1st edition, 1403H, 1983M, p. 117.

2- Al-Aqqad, Abbas Mahmoud : Studies in Books and Life., p. 118.

the immortals in Paradise and Hell and their characteristics, as if it were expected of the Sheikh of Ma'arra to come up with something extraordinary that exceeded the limits of the familiar. In his view, "he elaborated on these characteristics as much as he could and did so well, but which of these things was not previously known and described? And what news of Paradise mentioned was not familiar to people in his time? All of these were facts and eyewitness accounts that they awaited, believed in, and trusted that they would encounter." ¹ Al-Ma'ari's only luck in his forgiveness was that he was "either a conveyor of the news of those who had previously conveyed their stories, or a commentator on those conveyed news and stories, and there is no great work of imagination and invention in all this."²

What can be gleaned from Al-Aqqad's views is that Abu Al-Ala did not convey the news of those who came

1- Ibid, p. 118.

2- Ibid, p.118.

before him in a completely factual manner, but rather conveyed news of characters, some of whom were based on reality. then let his imagination run wild and gave them a life other than the one they lived in this world. Otherwise, how can one explain the meeting of poets from the Jahiliyyah with others from the Umayyad era? And how can one explain the circumstances that befell the inhabitants of Paradise and Hell? All of this is the product of the imagination of the author of Al-Ghufran.

When Al-Aqqad finished talking about Al-Ghufran's imagination, he seemed to find himself confused once again about how to classify it. After deciding earlier that it was a book of literature and history, he found, from another point of view, that it was "closer to geographical books and descriptions of journeys than to poetry and flights of fancy, and more like recorded history than hopeful prophecies and amusing curiosities." ¹ Al-

1-Al-Aqqad, Abbas Mahmoud: Studies in Books and Life, Complete Collection, p.p. 118-119.

Aqqad continued to write down his opinions until he finally issued a judgement with which he was satisfied, in which he made the Risalat al-Ghufran an old story. but Abu al-Alaa "brought it back to us as if he had walked its steps with his own feet and narrated its stories to us as if he were the one who had first invented them. He lent it his passion and imbued it with his spirit, so that his heart was moved by it, and he wished for it, and his wish helped him to imagine it."¹ Therefore, it was appropriate for Al-Aqqad to see in the Risalat al-Ghufran, after what he said, that it was "a unique style in our Arabic literature, an interesting style and a delightful pattern in criticism and narration, and a subtle idea that we do not know anyone who preceded Al-Ma'ari in it."²

If Al-Ghufran was a little lacking in imagination, in Al-Aqqad's view, he believed that what most distinguished Abu Al-Ala in his message from an artistic point of

1- Ibid, p. 121.

2- Ibid., p. 122.

view was his tendency towards overflowing sarcasm, asserting that he was "a serious satirist in his sarcasm; He turns pessimism into optimism and presents despair in the guise of hope. He smiles at people's hopes in this world and the hereafter, then returns and smiles at his own smile. He mocks the unbelievers and exposes them in his words, but he is even more mocking and exposes the believers even more."¹ Through these words, Al-Aqqad was able to delve into the depths of Abu Al-Ala's psyche, attributing his distinctive sarcasm to his introverted nature steeped in pessimism, which was "a combination of three traits: this rare sense of duty [...] contempt for the world, and sensitivity, all of which are causes for pessimism, and all of which are also causes for sarcasm."²

Although the critical judgements of both Taha Hussein and Al-Aqqad are characterised by a certain

1- Ibid., p. 133.

2- Ibid., p. 133.

comprehensiveness, they remain pioneering attempts to bring the literature of Abu Al-Ala out of the darkness of the estrangement imposed on it by successive generations to the Arab taste of the twentieth century.

3-3. Reading "Bint al-Shati" in the Risalat al-Ghufran:

Taha Hussein and Al-Aqqad were followed by a generation of critics who made Abu Al-Ala's legacy the focus of their attention and research. Aisha Abdul Rahman was at the forefront of this group, both because she was their contemporary and because she devoted herself entirely to researching and publishing the literature of the Sheikh of Ma'arra. The *Risalat al-Ghufran* was a major focus of her work, which she explained by saying, "I was among the students who read it—in an unedited edition—to Professor Taha Hussein at the Faculty of Arts. After devoting myself to editing the text for seven years, I finally completed it."¹ After Bint al-Shati published the verified edition of the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, critics of her generation focused their efforts on determining its literary genre, and their opinions differed due to the different artistic angles from which they approached the message. The critic,

¹-Bint al-Shati, Aisha Abdul Rahman: New in *Risalat al-Ghufran*, a theatrical text from the fifth century AH, p. 9.

however, stated the following on this matter: "When I look today at my specialised study of Al-Ghufran, as I submitted it to the university twenty years ago, I am amazed at how I missed this theatrical text in it, and how my fellow students missed it too, as we searched for a place for it among the arts of Arabic literature, comparing it to maqamat, stories, and amali, and to the long Ikhwan messages that follow the style of classified books."¹

When Bint al-Shati was criticised for underestimating her study, she responded by highlighting the most important artistic elements that qualify the text of Forgiveness as a theatrical work, and she considered that the crux of the matter lay "in the difficult equation between the asceticism of its author and the sensuality of its protagonist, or in the subtle puns of Abu al-Ala al-Qarh's sarcasm, and in this strange role that he chose for him and imposed on him, out of hope and desire, as a

1- Ibid, p. 10.

friend who wishes him well and the bliss of the hereafter."¹

From this perspective, the critic set about producing a version of *Al-Ghufran* that conformed to the traditional rules of theatrical text, and was keen to present it, as she states, "without any alteration to the author's wording, context or dialogue."² She followed up her attempt with critical studies discussing the fate of forgiveness in fiction, in which she disagreed with the opinion of her teacher, Taha Hussein. — arguing that "Al-Ma'ari's imagination has a unique style in composing new images from old materials, and an innovative way of presenting these stories and sayings in a fictional form that personifies meanings and embodies images."³

In her specialised studies of Abu al-Ala's heritage, Bint al-Shati did not fail to refute the allegations made about his beliefs, which she believed were the reason for his

1- Ibid, p. 14.

2- Ibid, p. 13.

3- Ibid, p. 65.

exclusion from generations of Arabs. She marvelled at "the eras that stoned him - eras that were alien to Islam - and denied him the good things in life that he had forbidden himself, while not denying the permissibility of forbidden things and the violation of sacred things. They saw his abstinence from eating meat and drinking milk as a sin, but did not see the debauchery and drunkenness, the eating of people's rights and drinking of their blood..."¹ . As for his isolation, he chose it while being able to share the concerns of his nation closely and offer them, from behind walls, a living literature pulsating with the spirit of the age. His withdrawal, in her view, was not negative, "but rather a practical protest against the corruption of the environment and a strict rejection of the despicable conditions that prevailed in his era."²

1- Ibid, p. 45.

2- Bint al-Shati, Aisha Abdul Rahman : New Values in Arabic Literature, Ancient and Modern, Dar al-Ma'arif, Egypt, 1970, p. 224.

3-4. The Risalat al-Ghufran from the perspective of influence and impact:

In addition to these interpretations, which attempted to highlight the artistic features of the text of The Forgiveness, other Arab attempts emerged in which their authors interacted by studying the priest "Plasius," who confirmed the influence of Arab sources on the "Divine Comedy" by the Italian writer "Dante" in his book, published in 1919, in which he explained how Dante was directly influenced by the story of the Mi'raj and Abu al-Ala's Risalat al-Ghufran.¹

These researchers based their studies on the theory of influence and impact produced by the field of comparative literature, and Muhammad Ghani Hilal was the first specialist in this field in his book "Comparative Literature". After presenting the

1- See : - Hilal, Muhammad Ghoneimi : Comparative Literature, Dar al-Awdaand Daral-Thaqafa, Beirut, 3rd ed, 1981, p. 153.

- Al-Khatib, Husam : Lectures on the Development of European Literature and the Emergence of its Critical Schools and Trends, Tarbin Press, 1974-1975, p. 84.)
1974-1975, p. 84

criticisms levelled at the Italian priest by some European fanatics, who claimed that his arguments were invalid on two counts :

Firstly, that the similarities between the Comedy and Arabic sources were superficial.

Secondly, that Dante did not know Arabic, so he could not have been familiar with all of this.¹

I have included the results of two studies, in which the Spanish researcher Cheroli and the Italian researcher Munios Sandino in 1949, in two separate studies, concluded that Dante drew the subject of his comedy from the story of the Prophet's ascension, which is an Arabic manuscript that was translated into Latin and Spanish and then into French.²

Ghoneimi Hilal supported the conclusions reached by the two researchers, saying : "In the Divine Comedy itself, there is evidence of Dante's familiarity with Islamic culture [...] He mentions what supports his

1- Ghoneimi, Mohammed Hilal : Comparative Literature, p.p. 153–154.

2- See : Ibid., p. 154.

appreciation of Islamic philosophy and its philosophers, placing Ibn Sina and Ibn Rushd among the wise men who contributed to the advancement of human thought."¹ As for Dante's knowledge of the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, he ruled it out completely, commenting : The *Risalat al-Ghufran* resembles Dante's *Divine Comedy* in terms of the type of journey, its sections, and many of its situations. This similarity has led some researchers to say that Abu al-Ala influenced Dante. This is incorrect, as there is no evidence that Dante was familiar with the *Risalat al-Ghufran*."² He explained that this similarity between the two works is perhaps due to the fact that both drew on the story of the *Mi'raj* as recounted in unreliable hadiths, and that Abu al-Ala had no choice but to draw on Islamic heritage before Dante.³

1- Ibid., p. 155.

2- Ibid., p. 230.

3- See : Ibid, p. 230.

Not far from this position, Husam al-Khatib denies that "there is the slightest reference to this message (forgiveness) in the writings of Dante or his contemporaries."¹ After comparing the two works in terms of content, the critic found "a stark difference between the two stories, even though they share the theme of an imaginary journey to the other world. Dante's poem is a mystical religious poem that aims at spiritual salvation and closeness to God, while Abu Ala's message is based on mockery, sarcasm and scepticism."²

Among those who adopted this explicit rejection of the claim of influence and interaction between the two works, in addition to those mentioned above, was Bint al-Shati, who ruled out Dante's knowledge of the Risalat al-Ghufran due to the lack of material evidence, stating that what is certain is his knowledge of Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Critic Abdul Malik Mortad responded to

1- Al-Khatib, Husam : Lectures on the Development of LiteratureEuropean, p.84.

2- Ibid., p. 84.

her, saying, "We do not deny that Dante may have read Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, but we do deny her stubbornness and exaggeration in claiming that Dante did not read Al-Ghufran, even though Asin Plathius confirms the relationship between the two works, after spending twenty-five years researching before issuing this judgement."¹

Abdul-Malik Mortadden criticises the researcher for closing the door on the hypothesis that Dante was familiar with Abu Ala's Forgiveness. As an Arab critic, she should have taken the opposite approach, without deviating from the principles of scientific research, seeking evidence to strengthen the connection between the two works. In his view, what she sought to do was to "deny the scientific and literary relationship that existed between Andalusia and the East on the one

1- Murtad, Abdul Malik : The Story in Arabic Literature, Dar and Library of the Algerian Company, 1st edition, 1968, p. 254.

hand, and between Andalusia and neighbouring European regions, including Italy, on the other."¹

As for Dante's lack of reference to the *Risalat al-Ghufran* in his *Comedy*, according to Hussam Al-Khatib, comparative literature research has never claimed that the Italian poet was directly influenced by the *Risalat al-Ghufran*, nor has it claimed that he copied it verbatim. Rather, it is sufficient that, through indirect influence, he drew inspiration from some of the ideas of Al-Ma'arri, and "the apparent difference between the Italian and Arab poets does not preclude the possibility that one was influenced by the other, for those who believe that Dante was influenced by Al-Ma'arri do not see this influence as a blind imitation of ideas and style. Dante is who he is, and his poetry is what it is, but the poet believes that an idea passes through his mind and he weaves it with his imagination as he pleases."²

1- Ibid., p.p. 254-255.

2- Murtad, Abdul Malik : *The Story in Ancient Arabic Literature*, p. 253.

This judgement is supported by the conclusions reached by the critic Louis Awad after comparing the content of the two works. He confirms the great similarity between Dante's comedy and Islamic sources in the following points :

- Dante borrowed from Muslims the division of the earth into seven parts, as well as the division of the heavens.

He took from Islamic heritage the idea of classifying sinners into different levels of hell according to the severity of their sins.

Dante's fundamental idea of paradise, like his fundamental idea of hell, is not taken from Greek and Roman heritage, nor from Christian heritage, but from Islamic heritage.¹

Louis Awad concluded his book "On the Margins of Forgiveness" by placing the Risalat al-Ghufran second after the story of the Ascension in terms of its influence

1- See : Al-Khatib, Husam : Lectures on the Development of Literature European, p.p.. 83-84.

on the Divine Comedy. Among the evidence he cited to support his claim, the research focuses on one of his statements : Dante took from Al-Ma'ari his depiction of Satan, as well as the style of moving between the layers of hell, which is reminiscent of Ibn al-Qarih's humorous style in crossing the bridge..."¹ . With this study, he was able to go beyond the historical interpretation, which relies on external material evidence, within the theory of influence and impact, to delve into the contents of the two works. However, did not highlight their artistic value, as his attempt was considered pioneering research in comparative literature.

The study by Louis Awad directed the attention of those interested in the issue of influence and interaction between The Divine Comedy and The Divine Comedy to the investigation of artistic evidence through the content of the two works. The study by critic Salah Fadel was one of the most prominent pieces of research that contributed to confirming the influence of Islamic

1- Quoted from : Ibid., p. 85.

heritage on the Italian poet. Not far from this meaning, he titled his book "The Influence of Islamic Culture on Dante's Divine Comedy."

Salah Fadl considered the document "The Ascension of Muhammad" - peace be upon him - attributed to "Abdullah ibn Abbas" - may Allah be pleased with them both -¹ to be the primary source that influenced the Comedy. Strangely enough, he only mentioned the Risalat al-Ghufran in a few pages compared to the size of his book, despite acknowledging that "the greatest Islamic literary work that shaped the epic of the Ascension in the early 11th century AD is the Risalat al-Ghufran by Abu al-Ala al-Ma'arri, which is considered one of the most mature examples of Arab culture."²

Despite the few pages he devoted to the Risalat al-Ghufran, he was able to draw a comparison between it

1- Included in "Salah Fadl" document "Miraj Mohammed" - may Allah bless him and grant him peace -AppendixHis book, andHe stated that he found it in manuscript form.

2- Fadl, Salah : The Influence of Islamic Culture on Dante's Divine Comedy, published by Shabab Al-Jami'ah Foundation, 1st edition, 1985, p. 72.

and the Comedy, focusing on their general similarity in form. He followed this by examining scenes that are almost identical, as if to confirm, without explicitly stating it, that Dante was undoubtedly familiar with the *Risalat al-Ghufran*. What he cited as evidence of their agreement from a general perspective was that they were both "journeys to the other world characterised by the absence of the supernatural and miraculous elements that usually abound in narratives of the *Isra* and *Mi'raj*. Except for the basic idea of the journey, which falls within the realm of miracles, the events that follow proceed in a manner closer to the logic of everyday life."¹ The characters of Abu Alaa are realistic and worldly, as are those of Dante, and both sought to present their scientific knowledge in their own way. While Al-Ma'ari adopted a plan to reveal his literary and linguistic knowledge and his critical judgements on the great poets, Dante left in his epic an encyclopaedic summary of his scientific and historical knowledge and

1- Ibid, pp. 72-73.

his religious and political experiences, which encompasses almost everything that was known in his era.¹

From a personal perspective, Salah Fadl presented evidence reflecting the extent of the similarities between the two works, particularly the scene in which Ibn al-Qarih meets two houris in paradise. After a long conversation between them, he discovers that the first is Hamduna, whom God rewarded with paradise for her asceticism in this world after her husband divorced her because of her bad breath. and that the second is "Tawfiq al-Sawda", who served at the House of Knowledge in Baghdad,² . He concluded that there is a "distant similarity between this incident and some of the incidents in Dante's work, such as his meeting with "Piasina" in Purgatory, and with "Piccarda da Nati" from Florence in the sky of the moon, and with "Quinza di Padova" in the sky of Venus; where the first of them

1- Ibid, p. 75.

2- Ma'ari : Risalat al-Ghufran, p.p..286-287.

- like Hamduna - mourns her misfortune and misery in her married life, and where "Piccarda" appears with her exquisite beauty and enchanting body, astonishing Dante because she was never like that in the earthly life, like Tawfiq al-Sawda."¹

Although Salah Fadl found concrete evidence of similarities between the two works, highlighting the extent to which Dante was influenced by some scenes in Abu Alaa's Al-Ghufran, he remained faithful to comparative research, which he considered the best way to explain the similarities between the two works. He concluded the pages he devoted to Al-Ghufran by saying: "Although comparative research has not yet established a direct historical link between Al-Ma'ari and Dante, the existence of Islamic heritage related to the Isra and Mi'raj as a common source, the possibility that Dante had access to a translation or summary of the Risalat al-Ghufran, and the similarity of some scenes

1- Fadl, Salah : The Influence of Islamic Culture on Dante's Divine Comedy, p.p. 78-79.

and situations all serve to advance this hypothesis and raise it as a question that still requires conclusive evidence in future comparative research."¹

While Salah Fadl places great hope in the theory of influence and interaction in determining the connection between world literature, critic Daoud Salloum believes that it falls short of transcending the external boundaries of literary works and is not equipped to explain their aesthetic dimensions. In his view, it "unable to explain the genius or high artistic ability that distinguishes a writer, and comparative studies neglect to discuss the aptitude of writers or poets, focusing instead only on the amount they took and gave."² This similarity between literary works can also be explained by the theory of influence and impact, because "pure coincidence may play a role in the emergence of works that are almost influential or influenced in other countries, at a time

1- Ibid., p. 83.

2- Salloum, Daoud : Comparative Literature in Applied Comparative Studies, Al-Mukhtar Publishing and Distribution Foundation, Cairo, 1st edition, 2003, p. 15.

when scientific research asserts that there is no such influence or impact."¹

Based on the research findings on the interpretations of Al-Ghufran's message by modern scholars, it can be said that it has remained confined to comparative studies without specialists in the field finding conclusive evidence confirming its connection to the Divine Comedy, and no more can be expected of them, as comparative literature , as one of its pioneers asserts, is limited to "the history of literature's external relations and does not address aesthetic and taste aspects and dimensions: it does not analyse or evaluate them, but merely highlights the external relations, media and influences associated with them."²

The confinement of the interpretation of the Risalat al-Ghufran to comparative studies has placed it in a negative position that consumes its aesthetic

1- Ibid., p. 22.

2- Abdo, Abboud : Comparative Literature, Problems and Prospects, Arab Writers Union Publications, 1999, p. 25.

dimensions, as it is an external interpretation that does not go beyond historical perception. Therefore, researchers should start from the text itself, rather than from outside it, in order to highlight the aesthetic values contained in Abu Ala's message. To this end, this research attempts to interpret it based on a modern approach to analysis, which views this problem as an internal and external dialogue process, focusing on the text of the Risalat al-Ghufran and attempting to build on the most important foundations and concepts of dialogue developed by Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin.

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