



# **The Epistle of Forgiveness: Volume Two: Hypocrites, Heretics, and Other Sinners: 2 (Library of Arabic Literature)**

*Abu l-Ala al-Maarri*

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One of the

most unusual books in classical Arabic literature, *The Epistle of Forgiveness* is the lengthy reply by the prolific

Syrian poet and prose writer, Abu l-ʿAlaʿ al-Maʿarri (d. 449 H/1057 AD), to a letter by an obscure grammarian, Ibn al-Qarih. With biting irony, *The Epistle of Forgiveness* mocks Ibn al-Qarih's hypocrisy and sycophancy by imagining he has died and arrived with some difficulty in Heaven, where he meets famous poets and philologists from the past. He also glimpses Hell, and converses with the Devil and various heretics. Al-Maʿarri—a maverick, a vegan, and often branded a heretic himself—seems to mock popular ideas about the Hereafter.

This second volume is a point-by-point reply to Ibn al-Qarih's letter using al-Maʿarri's characteristic mixture of erudition, irony, and admonition, enlivened with anecdotes and poems. Among other things, he writes about hypocrites; heretical poets, princes, rebels, and mystics; apostates; piety; superstition; the plight of men of letters; collaborative authorship; wine-drinking; old age; repentance; pre-Islamic pilgrimage customs; and money. This remarkable book is the first complete translation in any language, all the more impressive because of al-Maʿarri's highly ornate and difficult style, his use of rhymed prose, and numerous obscure words and expressions.

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