

subject dealt with in the Arab novel. When death stops being the subject, it is replaced by complete or multi-dimensional alienation which soon leads to death. The intellectual in both *The Trees and the Assassination of Marzouq* and *East of the Mediterranean*, by A. Munif, dies either through coercion or being killed. Similar is the situation of the innocent hunter in *The Ends*; he lives freely in the bosom of nature; as soon as the hand of authority reaches him, he is killed by a sandstorm. Wherever it goes, power means death. The alienation of man leading to the brink of lunacy is seen in *The Committee* by Sunallah Ibrahim, where the police chase a man in the street and in the workshop, even in his bed and kitchen.

In the conditions of Arab disintegration, we become familiar with civil war, or rather Arab wars in Lebanon. We face it directly or indirectly in the novels of Tawfiq Yousef Awwad and Ghadeh Samman, *The Mills of Beirut* and *Beirut Nightmares*, respectively. The total destruction of war is presented by the Lebanese novelist, Elias Khouri, in two works: The first is *The Small Mountain* which depicts the end of a whole stage in the history of a people, when all sacred values and ideals are undermined, when everything becomes permissible, when man becomes the cheapest commodity in the market of war and the industry of death. The second novel is *White Faces* which depicts a dirty war not conducted by people, but conducting them, because its continuation is necessary for the warmongers and for each social group to extract its privileges from killing. Defense of social privilege, guarded by death, converts society into a jungle; it turns the ordinary civil society into the enemy of all the arms merchants.

In the vacuum of such perdition, the forms of epidemics are multiplied: Defeat, power, oil which spurts in the desert to desertize the whole Arab life and carry defeat from the military arena into the home, schools, ideologies, etc. - all are epidemics to destroy man. The subject of oil is addressed by A. Munif in *Cities of Salt*, an epic novel in four volumes, which follows this tragic process from its very beginning to its potential future perspectives. Munif's book is the greatest Arab novel of the eighties and a landmark in the whole history of the Arab novel. While the role of natural resources is logically the realization of individual as well as social welfare, Arab oil has intensified colonial hegemony, bolstered repression and spread the cult of consumerism. *Cities of Salt* is a historical document of the tragic marriage between the accumulated colonial European experience and the primitive desert mentality, which gives power and luxury to the European and only a «city of salt» to the Arab. With the first rain, such a city melts away because the princes of Arab wealth do not consider natural resources as collective national property, but as private property destined for personal luxury, characterized above all by irrationality.

In relation to these transformations which threaten the very national identity, the Arab novel constitutes a historical document condemning the status quo and calling for resistance. It is a protest against a world which crushes man, besieges him, deprives him of his dreams and destroys his heritage. Ibrahim Aslan defends the traditional popular quarters in *The Sad Swan*. Radwa Ashour defends the unity of the family in *Warm Stone*, this family which suffers from disintegration due to repression and continuous migration in

search of a loaf of bread and a place that guarantees personal dignity, if this is possible. H. Mina upholds the banner of responsible optimism in *Harvest* where he proves that the militant can take hold of his destiny. We find also such a prominent novelist as Jabra Ibrahim Jabra writes about the terrified individual in his latest novel, *The Other Rooms*. Noteworthy is the fact that Jabra, in his previous novels, has been haunted by the abstract problems of life and death, perfect beauty and the individual who builds his own heaven on earth.

The significance of the Arab novel is not only seen in its defense of human, moral and patriotic values, but also in its artistic structure, and its belonging to a specific society and history. While defending the national cultural identity, the Arab novel tries to achieve its cultural identity through restoration of the literary-cultural heritage and coming close to the popular culture, to folklore. In other words, it tries to build a bridge between the literary past and present, to be a link in the literary-cultural chain which has a history, rather than being a literary genre that is borrowed, transplanted or imported. The features of *The Arabian Nights*, for example, are explicitly or implicitly present in *The Search for Walid Masoud* by Jabra, *White Faces* by Khouri, etc. The classical Arab culture is clear in the works of A. Munif, R.B. Jadra, as is the use of the popular tale in the works of H. Mina, Emile Habibi of Palestine and Jamal Ghaitani of Egypt, who goes even farther and tries to make use of the religious culture, ancient Arab architecture and the books of history. Ghaitani's *Al Zaini Barakat, Schemes and Manifestations* present a picture of his contradictory endeavor to construct a current novel with cultural materials of the past, leading the novelist, from time to time, to the verge of total formalism.

In brief, while approaching the real problems of the Arab situation, the Arab novel is driven to look for its literary materials within this reality itself, in order to produce its specific artistic form. Approaching reality is also reflected in the language of the novel, creating a vivid prose, far from the abstract rhetoric which is associated with the religious culture and abstract nationalist ideology. Traditional culture, its religious version in particular, considers that linguistic rhetoric lies in the imitation of the original religious texts; it considers the abstract book a point of reference; whereas the novel looks for its language in its search for the everyday subject which it depicts; it establishes an objective link between the word and the subject it refers to. Therefore, the novel, in addition to the press, is the essential sphere where Arabic is being developed and rendered current. Thus, the novel is the main field where the language is being liberated from the fetters of theology. It is not strange that the narrow religious ideology has, from the beginning of the century, opposed the novel, considering the imaginary world of fiction to be a false image which distorts reality and truth.

Basing itself on daily realities and protest against them, the Arab novel is creating its readers who read about their problems in it and there find how they live and what they want to say; hence the relationship of alliance and dialogue between the novelist and the reader. It is a dialogue about the causes of the current devastation and the means of overcoming it. At the same time, it is an alliance between two parties rejecting the same reality. The facts asserted in the Arab novel create the