



## THE ROLE OF THE HERO AND HEROIC IN ABDUL RAHMAN MUNIF'S NOVEL *CITIES OF SALT*

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### ABSTRACT

*Munif is considered a realist novelist whose distinct achievement is his unusual treatment of the hero and the heroic in his novels. He draws his characters from real life, in which romantic heroism is absent. In Munif's novels, the hero fails to be heroic, whereas some minor characters belonging to the poor class are invested with heroic qualities which appear only on occasion.*

*This paper attempts to depict the treatment of the hero and heroic in the first volume of Munif's quintet of Cities of the salt novel. It will study some central and minor characters in this volume, focusing on their function in their societies, as well as in the novel itself with the image of heroism in which Munif represents them.*

**Key Words:** *Hero, Heroic, Wadi al-Uyoun, Miteb al-Hadhal, Ibn Rashid, Mufaddi al-Jadaan and Dr. al- Mahmalji.*

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. The Hero and the Arabic Fiction:

The novel can be characterized as our best means for understanding ourselves and the world around us. The roots of the Arabic novel are to be found in what is commonly known as the Arabic Renaissance that reached its peak in the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and early decades of the last century.



Looking back at the literary achievements of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one can see that the concept of the hero in many works is expressed generally through the story of a young man brought up and educated in a certain set of impressions of liberation movements and their associated legends. The writers of this period present the hero in their works as an individual personality, although this does not mean that when their hero – individual achieves his full potential, his behavior in all situations is the same and with one meaning. In their stories the hero is perceived as a person, keeping the ‘core’ of his identity, individuality, and originality through the adventures and spiritual wounds of life.

The second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a time of farewell to illusion and abandonment of utopian aspirations. The magnificent romantic ambition and glory of the myth, which enlightened the lifestyle of young heroes in the first half of the last century, fades before the new national reality. It can be seen that the hero of this period faces a fear that dissolves the contours of reality and makes the whole world uncertain and dangerous. Everyday reality turns into an absurdity that does not make sense to a human being, and the hero may lose not only his personality but also his life in his battle with death. This is obvious in the titles of most of Abdul Rahman Munif’s novels such as *The Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq*, *When We Left the Bridge*, *Endings*, *A World Without Maps*, and his quintet of *Cities of Salt*.

## 2. Munif and His Fiction Works:

Munif is one of the most talented Arab novelists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He uses modernist narrative techniques similar to magical realism and promoted a new genre of fiction that reflected the social, political and economic realities of modern Arab society. He devoted most of his works to protect the freedom and dignity of the Arab individual, regardless of his/her geographic location. He discussed corruption, repression, reverence for Bedouins and crisis in the Arab World like Oil, Political Islam, and dictatorship, through his novels and other works.

Munif was born in Amman, Jordan in the year of 1933. He held Saudi citizenship until he was stripped of it for his political opposition to the Saudi regime. He studied law in Baghdad and Cairo and then received his Ph.D. in oil economics from the University of Belgrade. He worked in the Syrian and Iraqi oil industries. While working in Syria, he wrote and published his first novel, *al-Ashiar wa-Ightival Marzua* (The Trees and the Assassination of Marzuq). This novel was followed by *Oissat Hubb Maiusivah* (A Marian Love story) and *Hina Tarakna al-Jisr* (When We Left the Bridge). These three early novels, despite their attempts at introducing modern techniques, were still, in many ways, novels of apprenticeship. They are good works, yet little is innovative or original in them.

It was with such works such as *Sharq al-Mutawassit* 1977 (East of the Mediterranean, 1985) *al-Nihayat* 1978 (Endings, 1987), and *Sibaq al-Masafat al-Tawilah: Rihlah Ila al-Sharq*



1979 (Long Distance Races), that Munif started to acquire his own independent and original voice in the contemporary Arabic novel. Following these novels, Munif published in 1982 *A'alm bila Kharait* (A World Without Maps) which he co-wrote with Jabra Ibrahim Jabra.

Munif's remarkable work is *Mudun al-Milh* quintet (Cities of Salt). It is the longest novel in modern Arabic literature. This huge novel of more than 2500 pages is the story of a community in a desert that is completely changed by the discovery of oil. The novel was banned in several Arabic countries. Daniel Burt, in his *The Novel 100*, ranked Munif's quintet as the 71st greatest novel of all time.

The five-part novel the (1984-89) registers the history of Arab life through the critical eye of an insider. The first volume, *Al-Teeh* (The Labyrinth, 1984), covers the years from 1933 to 1953. The second volume, *Al-Ukhdood* (The Trench, 1985), deals with historical events between 1953 and 1958. The third volume, *Taqaseem Al-Layl Waa Al-Nahar* (Variations on Day and Night, 1989), moves backward to the period between 1891 and 1930. The fourth, *Al-Munbatt* (The Uprooted, 1989), moves forward to the years between 1964 and 1969. The fifth, *Badiyat Al-Dhulumat* (Desert of Darkness, 1989), which is divided into two parts, first returns to 1920-35 and then moves to 1964-75.

### 3. The Hero and Heroic of the Author

Fundamental to Munif is the issue of the hero and heroism in his novels. Munif's depiction of the hero as a normal man of limited capacities comes from his realistic vision of man in the modern world of industry and technology, in which, the condition of man has been reduced to a status of a machine. In this manner, the conventional single hero, who used to dominate the story from the beginning to the end, is missing from his novel *Cities of Slat*. On several occasions, Munif insists that the single hero of the traditional novel has lost his appeal and that he has to disappear because he is no longer relevant in the modern world. In his book *The Writer and the Exile* he writes:

The single hero of the novel, who occupies the entire space, whereas the others who surround him are only a decoration designed to manifest him and expose his Heroic deeds, this illusory hero, who dominated the Novel for a long time has to give way; he has to occupy only the space and time which he deserves (p.76).

Munif differentiates between the "hero" and the "central character," arguing that modern fiction utilizes characters whose qualities and activities are inconsistent with the common sense of the terms "hero" and "heroism." In fact, the hero of a modern novel is no longer



heroic; he may be completely the opposite. He may be the anti-hero, the hypocrite, the coward, the desperate, the traitor or something like.

Munif points out that a new conception of heroism has recently emerged. By the way that people, in their daily personal or social struggle, become the true heroes of the novel. Accordingly, they ought to be displayed in the novel as one after the other. Munif presents a chain of the focal character as a replacement for the unique conventional hero. But he does not present his principle figures together; he displays them as successors to one another. In spite of the fact that it is difficult to draw a line amongst focal and minor characters of Munif, the novel displays no less than five fundamental characters and an incalculable number of minor ones. Munif says that the sequence of characters resembles a "multi stage sprint," before a hero disappears, another appears to carry the banner and follow the mission assigned to him.

The purpose of Munif in introducing a variety of "heroes" is to limit the hero and heroism, Munif is interested in representing the changing status of the current Arab World. His world in *Cities of Salt* is a world of flux. It is analogous to the real world and reflects the continuity of life as it is really in the Arabian Peninsula for decades. In his *Cities of Salt* novel, Munif dramatizes a historical age portrayed by quick social, economic and political changes following the discovery of oil in the Arab world.

Each of his central characters represents a stage in history, or part of it, with all its prevailing values, attitudes, and traditions. Therefore, when a stage gives way to another, its characters should either retreat from the center or disappear completely, opening the way for new characters to represent new sets of values to occupy the center.

Miteb al-Hadhal, the man of the past, vanishes with the beginning of the oil discovery, leaving the space for men like Ibn Rashid, Mufaddi al-Jadaan, and Ibn Naffa to dominate the events of the next period before they are replaced by new set of characters such as Dr. Mahmalji, Shamran, Saleh al-Rashdan and Others to usher in the emergence of a new era, and so on.

What makes most of the central characters of Munif distinguishes, particularly in the first volume of *Cities of Salt*, is that they are displayed as fully developed characters. They are, in most cases, middle-aged or around. When they jump up in the novel, they spring as husband, fathers or old bachelors, whose prior lives have been shaped out of the novel. Their lives in the novel are usually short and are associated with public life much more than with their domestic affairs.



#### 4. Hero and Heroic in *Cities of Salt* (al-Teeh)

In the first volume of *Cities of Salt*, *al-Teeh (The Labyrinth)*, Munif depicts his central characters as ordinary human beings caught up in the historical, social or political event, where they are pushed to the foreground to be looked at as heroes, despite their impotence before big challenges. To begin with, Munif's hero, Miteb al-Hadhhal who would have been an ordinary man leading his ordinary life before the sudden appearance of the Americans in Wadi al-Uyoun searching for oil. Miteb attempts to resist the Americans existence in the Wadi elevate him to the level of a hero.

Miteb's frequent visits for the Americans to the Wadi, makes him feel that a catastrophe is going to occur in his land in the near future. As a sociable member of his society, Miteb warns his people, not to trust the foreigners. He could not believe that they have come to search for water, simply because the location of water is known to everyone. He concludes that they must have come, for some devilish ends, probably for this land, to possess it, or destroy its natural structure by their satanic tools and machines.

Miteb's relation to his homeland is similar to that of the rain and soil. His passion for his land is essentially a national love for his native soil. The Americans are bent on profaning the codes of honor and tearing up the social texture of the Arab community in the Wadi; therefore, he believes, that it is his duty to stand and resist against them. No wonder, Miteb springs out of a family distinguished in warning the foreigner and defending their homeland. He often recalls the old heroic days of his father, the legendary Jazi who used to fight against the Turks during his time.

Miteb would like to follow his father's footsteps, but he is aware that the Americans are much more powerful than the Turks. However, he provokes his people to resist and to even fight, but all his attempts go with the wind. He finally realizes that his people are not yet prepared to stand against such a strong enemy, who is also backed by the government. When Miteb sees the America huge machines coming towards the Wadi, he becomes sure that his age is ebbing fast, and that he must disappear:

*He worked calmly, reading everything he needed, without looking at anyone, without hearing a single word they said. He still had tearstains on his face but he did not cry, and when he had finished preparing everything he gathered up his rifle and waterskin and mounted his Omani camel. He looked at them all, at each of their faces in turn as if memorizing them, and when he had scrutinized them all he kicked the camel's sides, and she trembled as she reared up and stood. Miteb rose on her back like a huge tent, and then he*



*looked like a cloud, and when he sped off he looked like a white bird. He faded from sight and grew smaller, dwindled and then disappeared (p.107).*

Without a doubt, Miteb is a brave man, but, like any human being, he combines two extremes within him: strength and weakness, rashness and wisdom. His heroism lies not only in his bravery or boldness but also in his awareness of his potential and potential of his people. Once he decides to take heroic action against the Americans. So he rides his horse down the valley until the American camp is within the shotgun. He spends all night at the camp, raising and lowering his gun. But he does not attack, perhaps because he realizes that individual heroism is useless in such situation. Miteb's understanding of the limitations of his people included in him. Powerless to do anything, like all the people of the Wadi, Miteb watches the American machines that destroy the Wadi and removing everything to give birth at the end of a world that has existed for a very long time and the emergence of a new world, on which Miteb turns his back, preferring to disappear forever rather than live his life in servitude and oppression.

Munif as a creative novelist is clearly manifested in his development of the character of Miteb after his disappearance in the desert. Once Miteb's physical existence ends, his moral presence as a heroic hero begins through the minds and imagination of those who have been associated with him in his life. The evacuated people of the Wadi, expect Miteb to reappear to fight the strangers and take them out. But when they despair of his return, Najma al-Mithqal, al-Hedra's fortune-teller, tells them when they asked about Miteb that:

*He would certainly come back. She said that he was wandering in the desert, moving from one place to another and that he slept far away in a place near the sea. He would be there for years but would eventually come back, and his return would be sweeping and violent like the simoom, the hot sandstorm: no one would be able to stand against it (p.131).*

Indeed Miteb's disappearance becomes an act of resistance. He turns out to be a hope for the oppressed people and the expected salvation for their ordeal. Miteb, in fact, is one of the Wadi's people, not different from them except for his sudden disappearance which singles him out as different and distinct. Miteb beings as a common man, but, by the accumulation of legends and tales told or invented about him, he is transformed into a legendary hero, who, according to the people, will return one day relieve their suffering and put an end to their distress.

Miteb's Specter fills the entire desert. For the Arabs, he becomes a driving spirit that moves over them to lift them out of depression and encourage them to withstand and resist. But for



the Americans and their Arab cooperators, he turns to a ghost who haunts their camps, filling them with anxiety and fear. Miteb's specter continues to appear and disappear, causing panic for the Americans. He is implicitly or explicitly accused of being behind some incidents in the desert. The American camp in H2 happens to suddenly catch fire on a wet night, and a number of tents are burned. No one in the camp can explain how the tents could catch fire on such a wet night. The Americans, taken by surprise and driven by terror, fail to do anything except for screaming and running around in all directions. However, the Arab workers, using primitive methods, succeed in putting the fire out before it extends to the whole camp. Now "they were all sure that Miteb, who had gone for long years, no one knew where was back, and that he would make the desert a hell for the Americans" (p .511).

Thus, Miteb, as a hero present or absent, continues to exert a strong spiritual influence on the people of the desert. In Harran, to which the Americans develops into class conflict, where new "heroes" inspired by Miteb appear to take their place and, from this moment, lead the struggle.

Ibn Rashid comes to lead the events of the next period with the disappearance of Miteb. But unlike Miteb, Ibn Rashid is blinded by gold. After the destruction of Wad al-Uyoun, he moves to Harran to be close to the Americans, hoping to quickly rise in wealth and power. Supported by the Americans and the authorities, he exploited the workers whom he recruited for American companies and insist on residents to sell their land, promising to pay them a high price. He even threatens them when they refuse to satisfy his wishes, reminding them all the time of Wadi al-Uyoun, in which "there is not a single house or person left there, everyone had to leave. They were all scattered under the stars, some in the east and some in the west (p.225). But an unexpected incident puts an end to his ambition and his greed. A worker named Mizban drowns in the sea while working for the Americans, and Ibn Rashid is being responsible for his death. He is therefore invited to compensate for death and to obtain his rights. But Ibn Rashid refuses to meet their demands because the death was registered by American company and that the American company should, therefore, pay the compensation in cash, which suggests the beginning of the struggle between the poor and the rich on the one hand, and the internal conflict and competition within the exploiting class on the other.

With the threat of revenge on Mizban's relatives, Ibn Rashid retires to his home, where he begins to suffer a state of agitation resulting from fear and despair. The incident affects both the man's behavior and actions because "at first he was shocked, then his shock turned to confusion and silence, then both turned to fear" (p.377). Despite the fact that Ibn Rashid is silent now, he seems to suffer a spiritual collapse, because of the mysterious disappearance of Mizban's relatives, he does not feel better. On the contrary, his psyche continues to get worse to the extent that he assumes that "the demons have started to eat him up" (p.377).



The Harrani people are going through a rumor about which Ibn Rashid must have listened to, that Mizban's relatives are now joining Miteb and his army in Ujra, and are expected in Harran at any time. In this respect, especially the reference to Miteb, who Ibn Rashid once dropped and betrayed, it is likely that he is tormented by the sense of guilt. He seems to be repentant, for when he is addressed, "he answered them only with sad smiles and brief, fragmented replies" (p.386). His suffering manifested through a combination of fear, sadness, and silence is probably due to the fact that he has discovered himself to himself, that he has sunk up to his ears in evil and that it is time for him to pay in full. Eventually, Ibn Rashid neglected by all, the Emir, the Americans, his rivals and, of course, the people of Harran. He is left, as the Emir asks him, to "pull his thorns with his own hands" (Munif, p.365). Ibn Rashid's thorns are really fatal. He continues to suffer alone until he dies in solitude. Now that Ibn Rashid has died, the people of Harran:

*Felt in some way responsible for his death, or at least re-sponsible for leaving him to die like that without doing anything to help him, not even fetching a drop of water for him in his last hours, or giving a kind or encouraging look to help him die more restfully or more at peace with himself or with less guilt (p.417).*

This is the case with the central characters of Munif in *Cities of Salt*; they are locked in their lives, missed or fought once they disappeared. While Miteb, as a hero of the past, is really missed, Ibn Rashid, despite his wickedness, is indeed pitied. The Harrani people will later realize that Ibn Rashid, when compared to the new villains, is much less villainous. So "he was long remembered, and his memory took on features new and vastly different from what it had in the past" (p.418)

Mufaddi al-Jadaan, is also one of Munif's simple heroes in the *Cities of Salt*, emerging from the poor to make a simple heroic mission and disappear. Mufaddi is considered the extension of Miteb in Harran and the practical continuation of his struggle against the Americans and the gold dreamers. Mufaddi, the "doctor" of Harran, is a middle-aged single who could have been rich if he had been interested in money. But "Mufaddi had never worked for money and did not hide his contempt for it, nor did he trade his services for favors" (p.547).

Mufaddi's hate for money results from his satisfaction with his simple, pure life, on the one hand, and his belief that money is a source of evil and corruption, on the other. He notes that the Harran society is divided into two main social groups: the wealthy, exploited group of Americans and their Arab allies, who are always worrying about wealth and power, and the poor, exploited group of peasants and poor workers. Mufaddi believes that it is his duty to



warn his people of the corruption and antagonism that begin to spread fast in the Arab community as an inevitable result of wealth. He directs his curses and threat to the rich people who subordinate their moral values to their material gains, accusing them of robbing the poor, exploiting the workers and committing serious crimes including murder. Though he is beaten several times, he does not give up or retreats, for he is. His partner, Khazna al-Hassan, advises him to be careful of those people because they are much more powerful than he is. But Mufaddi does not listen, for he who possesses nothing fears nothing. So he plainly defies them:

*"People of Harran!" he shouted in the street. "Let those present convey this to those who are absent: Ibn Jeddah is the same man he was, he has not deceived or betrayed anybody. He owns nothing in this world and fears no one but Almighty God. People of Harran, money have corrupted many before you. It has corrupted nations and kingdoms. Money enslaves, it subjugates, but it never brings happiness. (p.553)*

Mufaddi stands unprotected against a sweeping power. So he is arrested, charged with "suspicion of theft" and imprisoned for forty days. He becomes the first prisoner in Harran. He is detained and tortured again and again. Each time on a different charge: once for being a "troublemaker", another for being, a "vagabond." Finally, he is "to report to work in the stone quarry or to leave Haran for good" (p.561). But Mufaddi does not stop. He resumes his life, as usual, treating his patients happily, and cursing commander Jawhar and "whoever had given him his uniform" (p.566). Some days later Mufaddi is found killed near the mosque.

The death of Mufaddi has a great effect on the people of Harran as the disappearance of Miteb. The mysterious incident of his death remains long settled in the memory of the people of Harran. All Harran, including a representative of the emirate, gathered together to attend the funeral procession and farewell. When passing by Dr. Subhi's clinic, the people who are carrying the bier "felt a sudden strong tremor, so strong that the bier nearly fell from their hands" (p.575). The trembling of Mufaddi's body, which people feel or imagine to sense, can be perceived as a tremor within them, an increase in indignation against the doctor, who is suspected of being behind Mufaddi's killing. It is a true translation of the common sense of rejection for strangers, which prefigured the eruption of a popular uprising in the near future. Thus, two days after Mufaddi's death, violence is activated in the American Harran between the Arab workers and the soldiers. Confrontations break out when workers refuse to restart the work because of the American company's decision to displace some workers from work. The workers motivated by Mufaddi's assassination and heralded by his heroism, start demonstrations and strikes against the authorities, destroying and burning everything for the American in their way. The demonstrating workers are helped by the vast majority of the



Harran population, including the specters of Miteb and Mufaddi whom the people being to confuse. Mistaking one for the other reflects, in essence, the people's deep desire for unifying the symbols of resistance.

The issue of education and its influence on the character of the human individual, especially at the beginning of his life, also arises in *Cities of Salt* through the character of Dr. Subhi Mahmalji, the Syrian Arab doctor who occupies considerable space in the novel. Behind the arrival of Dr. Subhi in Harran is a romantic motive. While he was studying at the university, he read about the adventures of the first explorers of Europe, who discovered the new world and shaped its history. These stories formed a strong propensity to travel and filled him with ambition:

*The second motive was his passion for new places, which he'd acquired in his many travels and from the stories he'd read when he was a student in Berlin about the travelers and explorers who had reached the New World, how they had become rich in a short time and left their influence wherever they went (p.522).*

It is, therefore, the Arabian Peninsula that could be a new world for Dr. Subhi to explore. Considering this image in mind, he is heading south towards Harran, hoping to have the opportunity that will allow him to copy the explorers whom he read about. He knows that Harran, like many other oil fields in the region, is growing quickly and that an intelligent, ambitious learned man could probably occupy a central position in social and political life if he uses his capabilities successfully. From his first day at Harran, he began his serious attempts to establish his social position, surmounting his human duty as the only physician in Harran for his personal and material interests. For example, he refrains from helping Mufaddi, although the man is bleeding to death because he thinks that Mufaddi is an important obstacle to be eliminated before he can continue.

Dr. Subhi is a lucky opportunist. It happens that Prince Khazal visits Harran to open a new pipeline, and Subhi, supported by Prince Khalid, the Harran's emir, is authorized "to deliver Harran's official speech of welcome to prince Khazal (p.542), the result of which is a tacitly intimate relationship between the prince and Subhi. Once Dr. Subhi assures a central social position in Harran, an unexpected opportunity comes to exalt him from being an ordinary, though privileged, a doctor in Harran, up to a very high position in Mooran, the capital, on which his eyes have been fixed since his arrival. While Sultan Khrubit is sick, Dr. Subhi is called upon to treat him. However, the Sultan dies, and the doctor is rewarded for his effort. He is promoted to the post of private doctor and first consultant of King Khazal, who succeeds to the throne after his father's death. Thus, Subhi's dreams come true. In a short



period of time, he becomes rich and influential. His intimate relationship with the king opens the door for him to lead the policy of the kingdom. After realizing all this, he begins to reconsider his old romantic dreams and discovers that it is time to do them all together. He tells his assistant, Mohammad, that "he came to this place to change everything: minds and men, even the names" (Munif, 1992, p. 19). He believes that "he is devoted to a grand cause: to establish a state" (Munif, 1992, p.23), based on two poles: administrative, which he believes to have achieved and the philosophical in which he feels it is his duty to present a theory that would be the philosophical foundation of the new state. But he fails to fulfill this mission, always pretending to be too busy to think his theory over.

Munif's hero, Subhi, is a problematic character. The "historical mission," to which he thinks he is dedicated, dissolves when referring to his personal and material interests. He is, in fact, a conceited person. Although he considers Mooran's people "of another kind, almost like the animals of the desert: full of scales, hardness, and toughness, their skins are thick, and their depths are too deep to be perceived" (Munif, 1992, p.22), he assumes he is intelligent enough to influence everything within his reach. But when he is tested, he shows that he is weak, helpless and ignorant of the nature of the desert people. He sometimes, under the pressure of home-sickness or remorse, thinks of leaving Mooran, but he encourages himself to stay, assuming that "men are the ones who create the places and leave their marks on them" (Munif, 1992, p.22).

The immediate result of Dr. Subhi's preoccupation with his personal interests and his romantic dreams is the hostile reaction of the public manifested in the harsh and sometimes sarcastic criticism directed to him by Shamran and his party, whose attitude to him symbolizes the opinion of the masses in Mooran. Among the ruling class, he is envied and hated. He is regarded as being responsible for leading the country towards a tragic end, through his immense influence over the king. However, he continues his efforts to keep all the threads in his hand to control the whole situation. He brings his relatives and knowledge to be appointed to the very important positions in Mooran and leads his son Ghazwan to follow the same path so that he can be incarnate and heirs when he grows. But the most important step towards achieving his goals is his approval to marry his daughter, Salma, off to king Khazal, though she is too young to be eligible for marriage. But, to his disappointment, Salma's marriage turns to be the straw that broke the camel's back. It is his flaw which brings about the downfall of both the king and the doctor.

The subtitle of the fourth volume of *Cities of Salt, al-Munbatt* suggests its main subject matter. Now, an exile, Dr. Subhi, who is isolated by all, except for his daughter, Salma, realizes his painful memories and admits that he is fully responsible for Salma's crisis: "He recalls little Salma whom he removed from among her toys, from her rosy world, to throw



her in the jaws of the monster” (Munif, 1992.p.129). His self-esteem now turns into self-condemnation and self-reproach. He realizes that Salma who is divorced now, is an innocent victim of his selfishness and greed. When Salma dies, his rising suffering becomes more than he could endure. So he ends up into a sanitarium in Germany, not far from the university where his romantic dreams were made.

## CONCLUSION

*Cities of Salt* by Munif is considered an epic in its representation of the totality of human life over a vast desert region, where oil has been discovered and extremely affects the social, economic and political life of the entire nation. In order to embrace different aspects of human life, Munif discovers a literary form which emphasis on both action and character.

Thus, the range of the novel is so wide that it includes a large variety of settings, characters, social communities, historical events and etc. For this reason, the narrative is not structured around a single hero, single place or a single event. Instead, it presents a collection of tales and scenes linked together by a chain of central characters whose existence ceases to be once each performs his mission, allowing the space for another to arise. One of Munif’s distinctive achievements is his method of interweaving the various success stories of the novel to eventually form a whole. His transition from one plot to another or from one character to another is so carefully prepared that it cannot be felt.

Munif seems to have benefited from modernistic techniques, namely, the stream of consciousness, the interior monologue, the multiple narrators, and the extensive use of life like dialogue, which he has successfully employed in most of his novels. His *Cities of Salt* appear to be a combination of modern narrative techniques and the classical form of narration. Munif presents his central characters in a manner different from the portrayal of the hero in the conventional novel. His "heroes" are neither heroic nor exceptional; they are ordinary people with human failings.

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