Text and History in Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles of Majnun Layla*

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Abstract: This paper presents an investigation of Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles of Majnun Layla* by comparing the text with history, noting how the truth is based on texts rather than actual events. The aim is to show the impact of texts on the formation of Arabic poetry at the end of the last century. This research stems from the idea that a poet's work is based on a purely mental experience that results from reading texts, and the contemplation of the human subject and the nature of its feelings and thoughts, as well as the fact that the truth the poet seeks to embody, as is the case with Qassim Haddad, is related to the mental and emotional state rather than real experience. From this standpoint, the work of Qassim Haddad is interpreted as his wanting to correct what was reported about Majnun Layla; in so doing, he compares the value of this information with the ability to express the human condition, indicating that what happened in history was relevant only in so far as the state of mind produced by this case of love and passion was achieved.

The paper consists of three sections. The first is the textuality of the historical story—the historical version is only texts that do not represent historical truth. The second is the text and the historical subjects, which, in the information about Majnun Layla, are nothing but a linguistic textual form and as such their existence in history is unimportant. The third is language and truth; in reading the language in *Chronicles of Majnun Layla*, it can be seen that it over-stresses the significance of referring to a mental content that embodies the abstract idea of human love without restricting it to a single historical situation.

Keywords: Arabic poetics, *Chronicles of Majnun Layla,* history, Qassim Haddad, Qays, textuality

Introduction

Born in 1948, Qassim Haddad is a contemporary and prolific Bahraini poet who has published more than forty literary works of great merit. One such work is *Chronicles of Majnun Layla* (henceforth referred to as *Chronicles*) which has been quite understudied. *Chronicles* has raised several problems in contemporary Arabic poetics as it transcends familiar topics of poetry and takes a broad view beyond traditional genres and knowledge. In so doing, it focuses on the concept of how a text can transcend division into literary genres; it then searches for the effect of textual composition in overcoming cognitive competence, by focusing on the 'truth' as presented by Qassim Haddad. The *Chronicles* has received little attention from scholars since its publication in 1996, despite its importance in the context of modern Arabic poetics, and the idea it embodies. The main focus has been on the truth of its historical account, albeit with variations of emphasis. Nuha Bayumi's paper 'Akhbar Majnun Layla Qira'a fi al-Ustura—Qira'a fi al-Hub wa iqamat al-That' (1997). Bayumi argues that the *Chronicles* is a poetic adventure, because

Qassim Haddad 'ventured into a different reading of Qays's biography and his love, as he added to Qays's biography his own biography, which combined Qays's poetry with his poetry' (Bayumi 1997: 116). The study is concerned with the ability of 'the discourse to negate itself by placing itself under the command of the signifier, as well as its ability, in the free interaction of words, to reveal the randomness of any criterion' (Bayumi 1997: 130). Thus, we should consider this work in terms of its relevance to the truth, separating the respective biographies of Qays and Qassim, as the result of the free interaction of words. While this study is based on the assumption that what Qassim Haddad reported about Qays is his historical biography, it can also be asserted that Qassim Haddad's text is related to previous texts and is not only a representation of the historical truth.

In '*Lu'bat al-Mahu wa al-Tashkil fi Akhbar Majnun Layla*' (1997), Mu'jab al-Zahrani discusses those features of Qassim Haddad's text which highlight the transformation of the Arab poetic movement in the late twentieth century. These reflect a poet's desire to transcend their relationship with their poetic heritage through new interpretations. He states that, 'Chronicles (*Al-Akhbar*), which are restored from both literary and historical heritage have undergone processes of erasure, reducing and reformulation so that it is no longer "chronicles" that carry and transmit information, but rather parts or elements in a new text that celebrates itself by denying and undermining the old accounts and their heritage resources' (Al-Zahrani 1997: 227). He also points out that 'Qassim talks directly about Qays as one of his predecessors, without being connected to him through the "chronicles" that were narrated and written by narrators and writers of non-fictional writing' (Al-Zahrani 1997: 231). Al-Zahrani deals with the phenomenon without assessing the language of writing. He states that his critical approach will not be directed towards analyzing the poetic language nor related to revealing and defining the overall semantic nuclei in the text, but rather will be directed mainly to the 'general form' of the text (Al-Zahrani 1997: 231). In contrast, the focus of this paper is on the language of writing from the perspective of what qualifies as absolute truth, going beyond the historical event.

In Sa'id al-Hinsali's book *Al-Isti'arat wa al-Shi'r al-'Arabi al-Hadith* (2005), the author argues that Chronicles is a metaphor for 'chronicles', as Qassim Haddad relies on its 'dislocating the historical formulation of the news and on introducing this biography into the field of doubt, examination and questioning' (Al-Hinsali 2005: 276). Al-Hinsali is concerned with the difference between truth and falsehood, validity and suspicion. He concludes that Qassim Haddad employed various cultural components to 'build a poetic edifice whose basis is the reproduction of the metaphor, its flow, its filtering and its connections' (Al-Hinsali 2005: 293). This reading is based on the concept of borrowed historical stories, and indeed it is this aspect which is under review here, while also highlighting the tenuous relationship between the text and the truth.

These studies have dealt with the specificity of Qassim Haddad's work from three angles: the convergence between Qasim Haddad's and Majnun Layla's experience in the poetic form of Chronicles; Qassim Haddad's relationship with his predecessor, Majnun Layla, through the process of erasure and formation; and

viewing the presence of Majnun Layla's historical stories in Qassim Haddad's work as a metaphor. As opposed to earlier studies, this research focuses on the concept of truth and its relativity in its historical dialectic and textual manifestation in Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles*.

It is interesting that *Chronicles* realizes the concept of the text similarly to Roland Barthes, as 'a methodological field' (Barthes 1977: 157; Arya 2020: 174), depicted as a 'network' (Barthes 1977: 161), and its structure 'off-centered, without closure' (Barthes 1977: 159). This results in the representation of multiple levels of truth, the first of which is the physical historical truth achieved by the historical figure of Qays Ibn Al-Mulawuah. This truth is linguistically transmitted via a historical discourse, as in the case of historical narratives, and the discourse is intended to convey the truth as recognized at a specific point in time. The second level is the linguistic truth embodied by the character of Majnun Layla as he is represented in literary texts as poetic, narrative and critical. As for the third level, this is represented as iconic truth realized in the idea of 'platonic love' (الحبّ العذريّ); it relates the nature of general human thinking to the absolute value of the idea of love, and the sanctity it bears as shown by the term (*'uthri* عذري), as well as its association with insanity (*majnun* مجنون). In so doing, it evokes an exotic state that goes beyond the physical, sensual and natural. Thus, *Chronicles* is a text that includes a number of interpretations of several other texts, undermining the concept of truth in the text and overthrowing any desire to reach an absolute and final truth.

The focus of this study is the analysis of the relationship between the text and history while presenting the truth in three dimensions—physical, mental, and linguistic—respectively addressed here in three sections. Through these dimensions, the aim is, on the one hand, to demonstrate the semantic value of the idea embedded in the story of 'Qays and Layla', used by Qassim Haddad in many written implementations of the text throughout Arab literature, and to reveal the truth behind this series of writings as a long and extended historical path. On the other hand, these dimensions can be used to examine one of the cases of transformation in the style of poetic writing in modern Arabic poetry at the end of the last century. This understanding presupposes a return to 'the seed of the text', or what Revater called 'the generating model'. On this point, Riffaterre suggested that 'The conformity of the text to the generating model makes it a unique artifact' (1984: 20). It is 'the generating model' which determines the purpose of the text, meaning that the relationship between the text and its generating model can take one of the following forms:

1. If the text's seed and the generating model have a physical presence, then the language of the text refers to a physical reality that pre-dates the text. Therefore, the purpose of the text is history;
2. If the generating model is a mental one, there are two implications:
    a) The text is formed in a language that seeks a mental reality that is not separate from the language itself, so that the goal of the language is the language itself because there is no truth outside it. This language embodies a state of knowledge, an idea, which does not exist outside the language, and it does not cease to be transmitted by language as

in the style of an impossibly imaginative image. Therefore, the purpose of the text is, in this case, literary.

b) The text-generating model represents a transcendental type of human thinking, whereby the language of the text refers to an abstract existence that encapsulates absolute human natures in holistic symbolic connotations. In this case, the truth is conveyed through some mediation, such as an image, inscription, or a language. However, language in this case is a description of a state of mind, a reality of pure existence, representing nothing but the means by which it appears and is embodied. The purpose of the text is therefore to represent the nature of human thinking without any temporal or spatial constraint.

Hence, questioning the truth represented by the text in the three cases referred to above means understanding the text at multiple levels of truth as representing the seed of the text and its semantic generator.

In this way, the formula of truth in the text of Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles* can be uncovered by focusing on the three dimensions of this formula: the revelation of the textuality of the historical information; the examination of the subjects representing the purpose of the information, according to their multiplicity, differences in patterns, functions and history of existence; and, determining the effect of poetic language in interpreting the truth and reading the story as absolute poetry. These dimensions will now be covered in turn.

Textuality of the historical chronicle

The analysis of the text is intended to determine its association with one of the ideologies that reveal the text's identity, such as referring to it as a historical, religious or literary work. The link between a text and its underlying ideology is the outcome of the productive process that led its linguistic fabric to embody that existential state. This means that a truth of some kind represents the truth of the text, which makes the productive process of the text, as Julia Kristeva points out, an intensification of historical practice, in such a way that each moment can be visualized from the point of view of its production (1969: 25). On this basis, the critics' view of the concept of the text transcends its linguistic limits or, as Kristeva said, 'the text is defined as a trans-linguistic apparatus that redistributes the order of language by relating communicative speech, which aims to inform directly, to different kinds of anterior or synchronic utterances' (Kristeva 1980: 36; Sekkai 2022: 630). This means that any linguistic text that aims to convey an event or information is in fact a productive process that not only refers to an historical event but also intersects and argues with the moment of its production through historical narrators. Therefore, the historical information is dominated by the linguistic conditions that produce it in the narrators' texts. The nature of the formation of the historical version in the text of *Chronicles* is illustrated by the section on 'Enticement' (*Fitna*) (Haddad 2000: 234):

Al-Asfahanithe most prolific transmitter of Majnun's accounts
with brilliant command in weaving and unweaving Majnun's

> chronicles—related in his *Aghani* all that compromises a
> complete report, a firm account, a coherent text, or a
> definitive position. No doubt this was a sign that
> al-Asfahani's narrative failed to verify the full
> account, opting for the pleasing text. Thus
> the truth of such assertions contains no
> significance. Transmitters monkey
> with the truths of lives, their
> anecdotes making
> monkeys of us,
> while poetry
> entices (Haddad 2014: 58).

This section indicates Qassim Haddad's awareness of the textual status of *Al-Akhbar* through Haddad's statement that, 'al-Asfahani's narrative failed to verify the full account, opting for the pleasing text. Thus, 'the truth of such assertions contains no significance' refers to the co-occurrence of the three levels of truth to which he refers; the information or chronicles are related to the physical historical truth, and poetry and narrative are related to the textual truth as it is linguistically embodied. As for enticement and amusement, they are the result of the transcendental mental truth in the human being as it relates to the icon of love.

This passage also reveals the containment idea that represents the seed of Qassim Haddad's text and its formation. It is an idea that goes beyond the concept of truth and to what it is related, arising from the reliability of the truth in its physical concept to a state of enticement and amusement in the field of poetry. In poetry, the truth is re-crystallized not as having a physical existence prior to the text, but as a transcendental symbol in human nature. That is the iconic truth.

The attempt to identify the seed behind the formation of the text of *Chronicles*, and the idea of truth embodied in it, reveals the three cases referred to previously. The truth in Qassim Haddad's text has been dramatically distributed between these cases; the truth of the chronicles about 'Qays and Layla', as highlighted in Qassim Haddad's text *Chronicles*, either (1) has a truly physical existence or (2) is linguistically embodied. Let us now consider these options in turn.

If the truth has a truly physical existence, we find its representation in history, and Qassim Haddad's text will be seen as an attempted 'chronicle'. What confirms this understanding is that Qassim Haddad chose the word 'chronicles' (*Al-Akbar*) to characterize his text in the title, a term which inevitably belongs to historical discourse. Therefore, the truth of Qassim Haddad's text is determined as a historical text, presenting a physical reality in some form of a physical presence; it follows that the characters of Qays and Layla are real figures in history, and that the events related in *Chronicles* are real events. These events are collected in a group of sections: 'Now You Have Heard, Now You Have Seen', 'You Covered Me, Now Expose Me', 'The Wedding Night', 'The Night Described', 'Devine Guidance', 'God Will Forgive', 'All The Weeping', 'On Hajj', 'Something Other Than the Mount', 'Speaking Your Heart', 'Herself Eroticized', 'Laughter', and 'Never or He

Dies'. These sections are based on what was narrated in the genuine biography of Qays, despite their differences; the content of these sections does not deny the facts but differs in its orientation and authorial attribution. Perhaps it is possible to refer to the sources from which Qassim Haddad drew for these passages.

The section 'Now You Have Heard, Now You Have Seen' affirms its connection to the historical narrative through the use of 'it is narrated/said' (رُوِيَ *ruwiya*), with which the passage begins. The information that follows is well-known and repeated in the majority of sources which relate the story of 'Majnun Layla'. Haddad describes the visit of Qays to Makkah for the Hajj, which resulted from Qays' father's desire to pray to God to heal him from Layla's love. However, Qays prayed to increase his love for her. Importantly, Qassim Haddad continues to historicize this incident by defining the date accurately. He says:

> The day when the exact date of the Feast was established—so it is said—was a Tuesday, the twentieth of Dhu al-Hijja in a Hegira year when the Feast eve fell on a Friday.
> On that day, more pilgrims gathered than ever before. Qays was frightened when his father, taking the advice of their people who looked to God to remove Qays's love for Layla, took him to the Kaaba. His father asked him to hang on to the drapes of that holy edifice and pray for God's relief. Qays stood on a slight elevation in the yard and yelled into the sanctuary, pilgrims milling about, 'O God, may you increase my love for Layla and my devotion to her. Let me never forget her. Do nothing to distract me from her' (Haddad 2014: 28).

This incident is reported in the book *Al-Aghani*, without identifying the exact time by day and month as is the case in Haddad's text ('a Tuesday, the twentieth of Dhu al-Hijja in a Hegira year when the Feast eve fell on a Friday'), and without identifying the location details ('Qays stood on a slight elevation in the yard'). Instead, it says in *Al-Aghani*:

> The vicinity's people said to his father: pilgrimage with him to Mecca and pray to God Almighty for him. Then, asked him to hang on to the drapes of that holy edifice and pray for God to heal him from what he is and to make him hate her. May God redeem him from this calamity… Then his father said to him: hang on to the drapes of the Kaaba and ask God to heal you from Layla's love. Then, he hung on to the drapes of the Kaaba and said: 'O God, may you increase my love for Layla and my devotion to her. Let me never forget her (Al-Asfahani Vol 2: 22).

Qassim Haddad seems to have intended these details to confirm the historicity of the incident and emphasize it, and to agree with the historical narration. In this way, he unsettles the identity of the text, and prompts the reader to question the nature of the poetic writing that he presents, as it repeats a historical event in the same form as it appears in classical Arab books.

However, if the truth is linguistically embodied, this means that Qassim's text is non-declarative literature and this does not seek to present a pre-existing and

complete truth; rather, it shapes the truth according to textual-linguistic cases. These cases exist in previous literary texts, which center around 'Majnun Layla', whether they are the poetry of Qays or narrators' texts which have no characteristics indicating their truth; Qassim Haddad makes use of these to an excessive extent. It is evident that the text of *Chronicles* takes various textual forms, such as poetry, information, chronicles and criticism, thus eliminating the possibility of a single identity for the text.

The section 'First Lightning' represents the linguistic truth as embodied in the text of the narrators, as the linguistic formulation appears to ignore any reference guaranteeing the reliability of the text. This appears in his saying, 'Truth, which is pure doubt'. The linguistic structure of this phrase indicates Qassim Haddad's reliance on this contradictory situation, which could raise the presence of the historical information from the physical level to the purely linguistic. In this part, Qassim Haddad narrates the story in his own way, leaving it to his imagination and reflections to formulate 'truth' without falling into the trap of any principle organizing the truth outside his text. He is inspired by the content of what was transmitted from the story of Qays and Layla to illustrate what the narrators do not mention, so that he becomes not only the reader of the story but also its narrator and organizer. Hence, the story seeks only to embody its literary nature, which is presented instead of historical fact. This indicates that the story was woven in the imagination of Qassim Haddad and it thus embodies the path of love and its falling into the souls of Qays and Layla, as is evident in his saying:

> Nevertheless, a delicate thread of lightning seared through my parts, and I saw that she quivered. Out of her mouth emerged a cry, almost a wailing, as if possessed by panic. She had happened—I knew—upon the poetry of my soul, not yet turning on my tongue…' (Haddad 2014: 22–23).

However, two other sections constitute a sharp break with the historical truth, maintaining independence from any temporal or spatial circumstances. These two are 'Of Qays' and 'Of Layla'; both are based on an imaginary weaving of the two characters, who are summoned from history to narrate each other's story. In these two passages, Qassim Haddad relies on a dialogue that establishes a different version of the roles of the two characters as stated in history. No historical account indicates that Layla wrote any poetry for Qays.

Having considered the two possibilities above, a third can now be discussed. In this option, facts assume the shape of human abstract thinking, highlighting the value of *Chronicles*. Hence, for Qassim Haddad the text becomes an iconic embodiment of the theme of love, and thus it represents the supreme symbolic state of humanity. It is therefore a truth that transcends the real embodiment, or the personalization, of the characters, and is dependent on an artistic and not temporal state.

The transcendence of the symbolic truth is evident in the section 'He Is No One'. This starts with the title as it appears in Arabic (*Innahu la 'ahad* إنَّه لا أحد), whose linguistic formula combines the affirmation through (Inna إنَّ) and the confirmed reference to Qays through the masculine singular pronoun. In this way, the linguistic formula of the title describes Qays in a reliable form that nevertheless

contradicts the basis of his actual existence. This is followed by an attempt to shake the physical truth in preparation for its demolition, and then to reform it to embody the textual truth that Qassim Haddad seeks to construct in the wake of the destroyed texts and their rubble. After quoting a series of accounts about Qays' identity, Qassim Haddad says:

> He is Qays. And he is Mu'adh, son of Kulaib, and he is Qays, son of Mu'adh al-'Uqaili. Then again he is al-Buhturi, son of al-Ja'd; is al-Aqra', son of Mu'adh; also al-Mahdi. No—some said—he is the Qays who's son of al-Mulawwah from the banu 'Amir tribe. On being queried, those clans denied it: 'not one of us'. Baseless (Haddad 2014: 19).

After this destabilization aimed at destroying previous narrators' accounts, Haddad attempts to reconstruct the transcendental truth that he and everyone who studies the text on Qays seeks, saying:

> As for us, it was as if we assembled the man out of paper scraps tossed away by copyists—flung on the floor then celebrated in dreams. Our native compassion, girded by imagination, revealed him to us more than any rattling storyteller could (Haddad 2014: 19).

Next, he enumerates the narrators of Qays' chronicles to conclude that the truth about Qays is only found by identifying this unique human condition; neither Haddad nor the earlier narrators were interested in whether it really existed or not, but what matters for them is the pleasure all share in Qays' chronicles. Haddad states:

> We fell on whatever suited our disposition… For every part taken from this or that storyteller, we celebrate with a toast. The best parts we inflated to our taste. The Majnun enjoyed it. We had a great time with him (Haddad 2014: 19).

The linguistic formula in this prose verse appears exciting by embodying the containment idea that formed the basis of the text, starting with the plural pronoun that refers to a collective sense that transcends individuals (Qays, the narrators and Qassim), to place Qays in the position of both symbol and parable; at the end of the passage, Haddad insists on calling Qays 'the insane' (Majnun), wherein his absolute and transcendental symbolic position is realized as a unique state that goes beyond the logical, natural, and physical.

Qassim Haddad attempts to restore a tale that is disfigured by suspicion and narrative differences about Qays, and this quest to consolidate the situation embodies his desire to form his own text outside of any historical or physical reference. It is rather a response to the desire to generate reading.

The section 'Things' reveals Qassim Haddad's broader wish to symbolize Qays, whereby things such as 'a pointed sand grouse feather', 'a green silk thread his mother tied around his forearm when he was a child', and 'an old turquoise stone' acquire special symbolic value derived from the truth associated with Qays as an expressive and generating case of the truth of love. Therefore, these passages are no longer concerned with presenting a historical fact, or any truth subject to the physical reality. Rather, it is the product of a state of mind related to humanity and

human nature; it is the truth of love that is capable of adding value to things beyond their physical and materialist nature.

In the section 'Love', Qassim Haddad embodies the love icon represented through Qays and Layla, even making Qays' story into the symbol that gave the word love its meaning. He says:

> He was the first human to utter the word. He ushered in its meaning. In the language of the Arabs, it came to mean 'the description of intimate emotions that dwell beyond description'. Never again would the Arabs catch up with such a word of beauty. As for Layla, she fainted when she heard it. She never recovered. It was said that her name became synonymous with the timeless lovers' night in which desire crackles into exploding madness. *Layl*-night-without end. She became more the metaphor than Qays did (Haddad 2014: 31–32).

It is notable that Qays is presented as an icon, in which the word love was nothing but a representation of it, and how Layla's symbolism expands beyond physical, historical and temporal dimensions, as 'She never recovered' and 'her name became synonymous with the timeless lovers' night'. Qassim Haddad is playing with the semantics of language to construct a reality that goes beyond historical, real, and logical forms. It is a fundamental truth that one of the cases of its embodiment is found in the story of Qays and Layla.

In this part of the study, we have seen how textual status affects Qassim Haddad's vision of reconstructing the truth of Majnun Leyla's historical stories, going beyond the sensory historical dimension to become a parable and symbol of a distinct human condition expressed in the category of love.

The text and the historical subject
An investigation of the subjects in Qassim Haddad's text, *Chronicles*, indicates their distribution over multiple eras, fields, and humanitarian activities. This multiplicity can be indicated by tracing the characters to whom actions, speech, or facts are attributed. There is no doubt that the characters of Qays and Layla are the most prominent figures in the text, although their presence differs in Qassim Haddad's poetry, the narratives of the storytellers, and the unique representation of love which they represent. Although the presence of all these cases is derived from history, as the embodiment of real truth, they are not real. In Haddad's poetry about Qays, whose first section is entitled 'Of Qays', his beloved, Layla, appears as a poet who recites love poetry about Qays when indeed this was not a historical fact. Through Layla, Haddad says:

> I sing of Qays
> an ardor dwelling in flames
> his shaping me
> in his color, name, scent
> his opening and ending.
> A mist primeval,
> I straightened in his hands,
> bore fruit.

> He summoned me.
> Later when he wept
> Complaining about me
> I dispersed the crowd
> —his listeners—
> and considered them
> never again.
> In me he invested
> all his pride.
> His verses the people chanted yet.
> So I ask: Did he ignite me
> or did he choke my fire? (Haddad 2014: 17).

The text presents the idea of a historical break with the truth as built around Layla by Qassim Haddad, who takes her away from her historical silence to make her utter and recite poetry about Qays[1]; moreover, the text follows the image of Layla and how this image is formed through poetic sentences showing that the truth about Layla is attributed to Qays' poetry, not to the fact of her historical existence. This is illustrated by her saying 'his shaping me'. Hence, Layla is nothing but a poetic formulation that Qays penned through his love for her and his poetry about that love. Also, she is nothing but 'a mist' whose incarnation and realization occurred because of Qays, as expressed when she says, 'I straightened in his hands'. Layla believes she is nothing but the product of Qays and his poetry and, at the end, says, 'So I ask: Did he ignite me/or did he choke my fire?'. This expresses a paradox in the image of Layla as a textual subject formulated in Qays' poetry: because she became famous and alight, her image as a real historical person was extinguished. The textual vision provided by Qassim Haddad is that, as much as Qays' poetry ignites and draws the image of Layla, making her famous, so it extinguished her and caused her to lose her historical identity. From the beginning of the text, Qassim Haddad establishes Layla's character as a textual aspect formed in Qays' poetry.

In contrast, the character of Qays has a clear central position in the narratives of the narrators and the text of Haddad. He appears in Haddad's poetry following a list of names given by the narrators in the section 'He Is No One':

> He is Qays. And he is Mu'adh, son of Kulaib, and he is Qasy, son of Mu'adh al-'Uqaili. Then again he is al-Buhturi, son of al-Ja'd; is al-Aqra', son of Mu'adh; also al-Mahdi. No—some said—he is the Qays who's son of al-Mulawwah from the banu 'Amir tribe (Haddad 2014: 19).

These names were all mentioned in the earlier sources, the most important of which is Al-Asfahani's *Al-Aghani* (Al-Aasfahani Vol. 2: 22). This means that Qays' character was formulated in the narrators' texts, starting with his name; however, Haddad first refers to him through the voice of Layla. This confused history about Qays' name reflects Qassim Haddad's persistence in focusing on Qays as a historical subject, which justifies his new approach to the truth. This explains why Qays' voice appears in the new text; once again, 'the anxiety of influence' emerges as Qassim Haddad's subject becomes the one who formulates Qays' character. It is

as if the issue is an escape from the anxiety of influence manifesting the authority of Haddad's self-reading of the truth.

Moreover, Qassim Haddad's text relies on a number of narrators and informants as subjects who share a reality that does not absolutely belong to a historical subject. Rather, it is a human condition that draws on what was said about Qays and Layla, to establish them as two textual characters. Thus, the question arises as to whether the self-truth in *Chronicles*, based on a state of doubt rather than the certainty of a historical fact, lies in the persons of Qays and Layla. This is reflected in Haddad's saying:

> Doubt mingled with the biography of Majnun, causing oral transmitters to differ with regard to his poetry. Some claimed it belonged to a Banu Umayya poet who fell in love with a governor's wife. Afraid their story would become public, he attributed his verses to two names not to be found in any place. Thus the poetry circulated of Layla and her Majnun. Along the way, untruths resembling truths were added, so we believed them. Amin, author of *al-Hujra*, said in his version—without stamp or document of authority—that a man called Radwan al-Jinn claimed that Qays was real but his poetry was a fabrication, that he knew a calligrapher, Jamal al-Layl the scribe, who copied these poems. He said their composition was the act of a poet who fell in love with a young woman of the Arabian nomads who migrated between Najd and al-Ta'if. This young woman, however, was forced to marry another, so the poet, afraid of igniting fires among the tribes, took to the Peninsula's open air creating verse and legend wherever he wandered (Haddad 2014: 24).

From the narrators' versions, Qassim Haddad established that the truth of the self in the story of Majnun Layla is nothing but a textual subject, and his awareness of the textual state appears in his saying that, 'he attributed his verses to two names not to be found in any place'. This linguistic expression gives precedence to the text over any entity of the self: there will be no truth prior to the existence of the text, and the subjects in their spatial existence conform to a textual truth formed in the language, as is apparent from his reference 'to two names'. For names and language in general are the warranty of existence for everything that exists, or in other words, the emergence of the living from a state of latency to a state of manifestation. The truth remains, then, of a transcendental existence over a spatial or temporal existence, and at that time it would have been natural for increasing falsehoods to be believed despite their being untrue. As such, this represents the lie of assimilation and verification of a truth inherent in the human subject, which is the abstract truth of love present in the soul before it is embodied in any being.

This is evidenced by Qassim Haddad's introduction to Layla, who appears to be an absolute subject beyond her historical reality. He says:

> There was a woman named Layla, of whom it was said she was all women. And it was said she was queen of djinns who revealed herself to one person, gave herself to one man, so he took her. Then he passed his spirit into every passerby, every resident, every coward who ever concealed his love for a woman, exposing every woman hiding her infatuation for someone other

> than her husband. His name became synonymous with infamy: Qays. All around the land the shedding of his blood became lawful. Swords sought him out. But no sooner did these weapons find him than their holders appealed to him, 'Don't stop'. And he did not stop (Haddad 2014: 57).

Layla became the representative of all women, even those who were djinns, only because Qassim Haddad raises her to be an example and a symbol of absolute love. Hence, his text is not a branch of a higher original text. Rather, it is a complementary and expansive text that favors Haddad's view and presents his example of the eternal tale of love as narrated by the storytellers.

The understanding resulting from this reading of *Chronicles* in the light of the relation of the text to the subject shows that Qassim Haddad, as much as he seeks to talk about Qays' subject, fears at the same time that his subject will be consumed or perish under the influence and power of the presence of Qays' subject. Accordingly, Haddad faces what Harold Bloom calls 'the anxiety of influence', wherein 'poetic influence need not make poets less original; as often it makes them more original, though not therefore necessarily better' (Bloom 1997: 7; Hetherington 2020: 260).

If *Chronicles* clearly shows the 'influence' on the external level in all its parts, then the linguistic embodiment of the text is an entirely different case. Qassim Haddad clearly intended to rely on the problematic issues arising from Majnun Layla's story, with the aim of widening the gap and highlighting the contradictory accounts, to show at the end that he is the one who recognizes the complementarity. In other words, the uncertainty and doubt that Qassim Haddad deliberately raises about Qays and his truth, about Layla and her beauty, and about the narrators, is an attempt to remove the dominance of the idea of 'fatherhood' over the text, and to undermine the relationship of the self with Qays. This appears in many places in Qassim Haddad's text, as it lends itself to hearing Layla's perspective about Qays; Haddad also allows himself to say things about Qays which the narrators did not. In the end, the text expresses, in a highly hyperbolic form, the origin of the object or the theme of love, addressing the textual subject (which appears to refer to Qays' subject in the first place, even if it is open to various possibilities) by saying, 'Proclaim: it is love' (Haddad 2014: 74).

The subjects presented in the text of *Chronicles* are multiple and intertwined. In addition to the subjects of Qays, Layla, and Qassim, those of the narrators are present not outside the story, but as an important part of its fabric and theme. When Qassim quotes Al-Asma'i's opinion of Qays as 'a little confused, yes. But not mad', he replies:

> Al-Asma'i, O God, wants us to keep confusion apart from frenzy. Do words overflow with meanings beyond those that the carafes of dictionaries pour out? Does legacy mean anything other than the inheritance of first sayings? Aren't texts—body and notes—controlled by their exegeses? Should we say that we are mad while they are confused? Are we the cups and they the carafes? (Haddad 2014: 54).

It is clear that there is a desire to consolidate the idea of Qays' madness, and to give it a positive value. The response to Al-Asma'i is not based on the desire to reach a

historical truth, as it should be for those who respond to a historical narrator, but as a response based on a reading of the language. Being confused (*al-Lawtha*)[2] means nothing but insanity, and if this meaning is a result of what the dictionary decides, then the truth is nothing but what the inherited language decides. The subject is nothing but the outcome of the ability of language to express meaning, while legacy is nothing but another meaning for the inheritance of speech. This relationship extends to narrators who bequeathed the wisdom of the texts to Qassim Haddad; thus, the narrators are carafes, and the 'we', which includes Haddad, are the cups. In other words, the narrators injected Haddad with the inherited wisdom from their commentaries; it is as if Haddad sees himself as an extension of the same narrators of Qays' story as Al-Asma'i, Ibn Salam al-Jumahi, and others. Haddad seems to view himself as complementing the subjects of his ancestors, providing a continuation of what was lacking in their narration. He says: 'Al-Asfahani transmitted an incomplete account, which we have supplemented' (Haddad 2014: 55). What makes Haddad supplement the narrators' accounts is that he considered himself no different from the narrators before him, so he permitted for himself what they had authorized for themselves; he allowed himself to believe or reject their sayings, not because he approaches or moves away from historical facts, but rather because facts result from a deep desire in the self. This is how Haddad expresses his belief in Ibn Salam's account: 'So saith Ibn Salam and we believe him. Not because he swore, but because intimacy forms its own argument. Something in the heart points us that way' (Haddad 2014: 53). The issue of honesty, and therefore the truth, is dependent on the desire of the self and the heart, which means that the truth is not objective, but rather very subjective; it is the outcome of a purely mental experience.

The possibility is therefore presented of dealing with 'Majnun Layla' as a 'methodological field', according to Barthes' understanding of the text rather than as an object, historical fact, or literary work. The text of *Chronicles* shows this characteristic (the textual case), as it is difficult to submit it to the classification of literary genres as, in the words of Barthes, 'it can be read without the guarantee of its father' (Barthes 1977: 161). This puts *Chronicles* in the framework of the question about the relationship of the text to the subject, or rather the subjects to whom the text was related, as they became textual subjects; their existence is part of the text and they do not exist outside it. This starts with the two lines of the text 'Qays and Layla', who were a necessary part of the formation of the text rather than representing two facts. It can be said that we are facing a case of a magnum opus capable of comprehending the human condition embodied by this iconic reality. Hence, the story of 'Majnun Layla' is a linguistic representation of it, and the attempts of the subjects to contribute to the manifestation of this iconic truth aimed at constructing an absolute human truth. Qays and Layla were only one of its possible and extended historical embodiments. It is a process of appealing to a previous element (a previous transcendental truth in the human nature crystallized by the word 'love'). Thus, any of the subjects associated with the methodological field which is the text of *Chronicles* is nothing but a reader of a textual state through

which the subject seeks to achieve his presence. This is represented by Qassim Haddad's conclusion to his text entitled 'It is Love', as explained below.

Language and truth

Acceptance of the statement that language presents realistic truth (as it is realized in actual reality) is subject to much suspicion. Some linguists perceive that truth is determined by language alone; reality has nothing to do with this, as the linguistic sign has two sides that guarantee its semantic function, namely the signifier and the signified; any linguistic signifier acquires its semantic value from the conceptual fabric established in the linguistic system. This concept was a result of the trend of structuralist linguistics as understood by Ferdinand de Saussure, who explained it by saying that, 'Language is a system of interdependent terms in which the value of each term results solely from the simultaneous presence of the others' (Saussure 1966: 114). Constructivism is based on this fact and accepts the saying, 'the prison-house of language' (Tallis 1995: 48). According to the same author, 'If language sometimes seems to express reality "as it really" is, this is only because a second reality has been constructed within language' (1995: 15). On this basis, literary work can be viewed as displaying the picture of a homological structure with language itself (Culler 1994: 96). Language cannot reach outside itself in a metalinguistic truth (Tallis 1995: 15), and some literary texts will appear closed from the outside world, as they 'seem to refer primarily to themselves, to the genre to which they belong or other literary texts; or it can balloon to encompass the whole of reality' (Tallis 1995: 47).

These perceptions insist that truth is a problem of language, and that language in fact does not present a pre-linguistic truth; the value of this perception, in the context of intertextuality (Tallis 1995: 47), is in seeing literature as a non-referential language. In this way, it becomes possible to deal with language in literary texts through the semantic relationships that the language evokes, and which are translated by the language again, meaning that the language refers to itself according to its own system and the whole fabric of concepts that it represents. From this standpoint, it is difficult to deal with truth in the text of *Chronicles* as the historical truth is voiced in a language that conveys what actually happened in reality, and hence there is no pre-linguistic truth. It is simply a matter of playing with language, and using semantic and textual relationships, by employing some of the processes provided by the language itself; these include destabilizing the established system of the linguistic relationships forming the idea, taking consideration of the marginalized, searching for the absent through the present, and completing the incomplete.

There is a clear variation in the linguistic formation of sections of *Chronicles*. The sections entitled 'Of Qays', 'Of Layla', 'The Citadel's Garden', 'The Text and the Account', 'Love: So Many Doors', and 'It Is Love' are based on the seed of the original text as evident in the texts of Qays' poetry, his narrative, and their path through the narrators' texts. This seed, when it finds an author, has its linguistic manifestation in a new text, appearing in these sections in different linguistic styles. It does not seek to be associated with a historical event that represents the truth;

instead, as here, the truth is based on an event that only takes place within language, to the extent that language forms the icon of love as an absolute truth. Thus, the subject and event are the embodiment of an idea that is the seed of the text; by the identification of this seed with the subject and event, the text's literary manifestation is revealed. Hence, these sections are distinguished by a purely poetic style, as they cannot be traced back to any historical texts, nor to Qays' poetry or the narrators' interpretation. Accordingly, Qassim Haddad allows himself to show his effectiveness as the author of the original text seed and places it in *Chronicles* along with what was written by the author of *Al-Aghani*, Ibn Salam, or Al-Walibi.

The destabilization of the function of the historical, realistic reference in poetic language enables it to establish a truth that goes beyond the temporal and spatial setting. This poetic language conveys the idea of love, which represents the seed of the text in all that was said about Qays and Layla, including what Qassim Haddad said, to be a symbol and parable, to be an image or an icon of this unique human emotion. With this approach, it is possible to deal with these sections, particularly those which do not correspond to previous texts. On this basis, their unique linguistic composition is explained. The title of the first section, 'Of Qays', in Arabic *'An Qays*, reveals a desire to transcend the historical fact and resume its formulation, starting with the preposition *'An*, which in its contextual connotation means 'about', but is basically related to the meaning of going beyond (Al-Ansari 1985: 196). This establishes a different idea that diverges from the power of the supposed historical personality, Qays, and allows Layla to talk about him, outside historical fact, and to complete the incomplete story of Qays and Layla in search of the marginalized Layla. Traditionally, authority to speak is given to Qays about Layla, but Qassim Haddad reformulates this relationship by granting Layla the authority to speak about Qays. Thus, it is clear that the idea of transcendence and reversal is the beginning of this work.

In addition, this section opens with a linguistic formula that contrasts the usual style of historical writing. It begins with *Sa aqulu* سأقول, literally meaning 'I will say'. Historical writing refers to the past not the future, as shown by the use of 'س' in Arabic at the beginning of this section and throughout the entire text of *Chronicles*. Additionally, to begin with a verb that means 'to say' (translated by Ferial Ghazoul and John Verlenden as 'I sing') compensates for the absence of the historical dimension; in this way, the language establishes a different approach to what is historically known, to construct a vision that contrasts with the historical reality, establishing a timeless truth related to humanity and presenting an iconic truth of love.

The first section shows interesting linguistic relations, as in Qassim Haddad's saying in the words of Layla:

> I sing of Qays
> an ardor dwelling in flames
> his shaping me
> in his color, name, scent
> his opening and ending (Haddad 2014: 17).

The network of language relationships, which are based on parallels, shows interesting semantic features: Qays is parallel to 'ardor', 'poet' (this word does not appear in the English translation), 'color, name, scent', and 'opening and ending'. Thus, Qays does not become a single thing or entity, but rather is distributed in his presence between ardor, an abstract idea, and the poet, the embodiment of the ability to create and formulate by transforming the idea into a perceptible presence in color, name and scent.

However, if the text of *Chronicles* allows the historically marginalized Layla to speak, then it shows that she is a purely linguistic/poetic formulation. This is emphasized by the sayings attributed to Layla, such as 'his shaping me' and 'A mist primeval, I straightened in his hands'. Layla is created by Qays, not only through his love for her, which is the seed of the text, but also through his language and poetry, and so the authority of Qays is related to language and its power to create and formulate things.

Thinking about the authority of language and its ability to mean more than the user intends illustrates the effectiveness of language in cancelling the physical and historical value and confirming the absolute mental truth. When Layla says, 'So I ask: Did he ignite me/ or did he choke my fire?' (Haddad 2014: 17), this reveals the language game in hiding an unprovable and suspended significance, as it places Layla in Qassim Haddad's reading between states; it indicates that what Qays says about Layla both reveals her (ignites her) as a textual subject and hides her (chokes her fire) as a historical subject. With Layla's inability to assess Qays' actions, its significance remains unresolved, ultimately revealing Qassim Haddad's desire to add his account to the story of Majnun Layla.

The power of language in shaping the truth is confirmed by what appears at the end of this poem as the ability to impart the characteristic of permanence to Qays and Layla. For example, when Layla says, 'both of us night-blood soaked in the remnants of the *qasida*' (Haddad 2014: 18), this recognizes the fact that language, the poem, is a guarantee of the permanence and viability of Qays and Layla.

In the section 'Of Layla', Qays' voice appears, realizing the resonance and influence of his poetry on other poets. He says:

> She is for me
> an adventure stirring the desire of poets should they sing
> 'east wind of Najd, when did you start to blow so briskly?' (Haddad 2014: 20).

In the last line, Haddad recalls the saying of the Umayyad poet Ibn al-Dumayna:

> O east wind of Najd, when did you start to blow so briskly
> Your path has increased my adoring (Ibn al-Dumayna 1918: 29).

Then, Qassim Haddad shows what Layla has become in Qays' formulation: she transcends her real existence and becomes an image and an icon of young men's desire. She is 'manifold mirrors stirring the desires of young men' (Haddad 2014: 21).

The linguistic formula that opens the last section, 'It Is Love', reveals a fundamental idea. After the first section, 'Of Qays' begins with a phrase predicting

the future, to give an essential value to Qays, and to make him the center of the topic (love) and its truth. The linguistic formula that begins with this reference to the future subordinates the informant (Haddad in what he says through Layla) to the event centered around Qays, even if it is in the future form as indicated by the use of the Arabic particle س. Likewise, the reference to the future in the third section, 'Of Layla', begins with Qassim Haddad's saying, *Sa aqulu 'an Layla* سأقولُ عن ليلى 'I will say [sing] about Layla', deferring the act of saying to the future. However, the last section begins with an imperative verb, 'proclaim' (Qul قُلْ). This linguistic formula is requesting that something should occur that has not yet happened. A comparison of this imperative phrase with the future tense in the first and third sections (I will say) reveals the significance of the difference. Instead of 'I will say', which indicates informing, the imperative verb in the last section addresses a hidden pronoun that might refer to Qays. With this interpretation, the speaker (Qassim Haddad) orders and informs the addressee of what he will say, meaning that the poet, Haddad, will not remain a follower; he is the central source of the discourse, and whoever is asked to say or to proclaim is meant to respond by becoming a follower.

Then, the source of the 'saying' shifts from the state of a real being with a physical existence (Qays) to what he represents in terms of an abstract idea, giving Qays a special value as a bringer. The phrase 'Proclaim: it is love' replaces Qays by the word 'love', the abstract idea of the state of being, although Qays was the real being who represented one of the manifestations of the idea of love in the historical material sense.

Poetic language then begins to reveal the absolute truth and secret behind the *Chronicles*. Love is:

> Compelling air and glass,
> exposing the soul's psalmody,
> the doves' recitation (Haddad 2014: 74).

The authority and supremacy make love 'compelling', with a special transparent description ('glass that reveals the soul'). This description oscillates between existence and non-existence, between substantiality and transparency; it is an ethereal image. As such, the significance turns from Qays in the first section to the abstract idea that includes Qays and Layla and forms them both. Love is the one with authority, it is this etheric power that goes beyond the physical and historical. This poem and the entire *Chronicles* ends at its natural limit, explaining what happened to Qays and Layla: 'Proclaim it: Love/ led Layla to a night journey,/ guided Qays to the waters of ruin' (Haddad 2014: 75).

The truth is determined to transcend any physical existence defined by temporal or spatial circumstances, and to become absolute in the human soul and spirit. It is an abstract truth represented by the statement of love, so that what Qassim Haddad brought is a textual state in compliance with the discourse of passion and love. This truth of love is the first original text following textual and historical paths through the narratives of historical subjects, from Qays and Layla to the narrators themselves, who are no less important in determining which parts of the story they select, as Qassim Haddad's text states. The very last line shows

the possibility of embodiment through use of the imperative: 'Proclaim: it is love that sees you' (Haddad 2014: 75).

This reading shows that the seed of Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles* was formed from the case of 'love'. In this case, the text is based on an absolute truth in humanity and has found its representation in language and its effectiveness, representing the stock of human experience. Qasim Haddad not only exploits this in his work, he utilizes its historical verification and literariness in both subjects and chronicles.

Conclusion

This paper, in its study of the thorny relationship between text and truth in Qassim Haddad's *Chronicles*, ends with the conclusion that this text reveals an understanding of the chronicles of Qays and Layla which is beyond the physical and real truth. The literary value of the story of Qays and Layla lies in the doubt that surrounds its various aspects, including its historical subjects, who were nothing but necessary formulations in order for the story not to present a physical and historical truth. Rather, it is because the absolute truth which lies behind everything that has been said about Qays and Layla in criticism, history and literature is the human truth that raises the value of love as the essence of humanity. In this way, *Chronicles* confirms that textuality is a fruitful field for achieving this aim.

In the context of the transformation of contemporary Arabic poetry, such that *Chronicles* may be read as a poetic text, we realize that it illustrates modern Arabic poetry's focus on the human contemplative tendency to prefer absolute truth, and to go beyond reliable, physical and historical views.

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Endnotes
[1] There is no information about Layla having composed poetry, except for one reference in the book of Al-Aghani, by which Al-Isfahani concludes that the name of her lover is Qays:

I wish I knew, and the affairs are many,
When Qays' saddle will be assuming its burden and returning (Al-Aasfahani Vol. 2: 1).

Abu Bakr Al-Walibi reported that Layla was 'known for her erudition in poetry, literature, and the pre-Islamic and Islamic history of Arabs'. He added: 'The youth of Bani Amer used to sit with Layla and recite their poems, and Qays was among them' (Al-Walibi 2011: 49).

2 The meaning of the Arabic word *al-Lawtha* is stronger than 'a little confused', as it refers to someone with an inherent blemish in the mind.

Please use Arabic numerals for the endnotes here and in the text.

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