Using life and abusing life in the trial of Ahmed Naji: Text World Theory, Adab, and the ethics of reading

GIBBONS, Alison <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8912-9350>

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Introduction

> … after the chapter was published by *Akhbar al-Adab*, there was someone who went to the police office and accused me of disturbing public morals and hurting him, hurting his feelings personally […] They say that this is an article, that this is a personal article. So they think it's like my personal confessions. These things about fiction, the prosecution didn't get it until now. So, for example, they are accusing me as if I were the fictional character in the novel. Whatever the fictional character is doing in the novel, the prosecution is dealing with it as if it were my personal confessions. If the court gives us a verdict and if the court agrees that this is literature, this is a novel, I think this will have a huge effect on the freedom of expression in Egypt.

These are the words of Egyptian novelist Ahmed Naji speaking about his trial by the Egyptian State in late 2015 (RNW Media 2016; my ellipses). The trial focused on Naji's (2014a) novel *Istikhdam al-Haya* – subsequently published in English as *Using Life* (2017). An excerpt was also published in *Akhbar al-Adab* [*News of Literature*], 'the most widely distributed and read literary journal in the Arab region' (Mehrez 2008: 26), on 3rd August 2014. One reader, Hani Saleh Tawfik, took issue with the excerpt's sexual content, and on 13th August 2014 filed a complaint against both Ahmed Naji and *Akhbar al-Adab*'s editor-in-chief Tarek al-Taher. The complaint generated a sequence of legal processes: a public prosecutor began to investigate, not only looking at the excerpt but also 'combing through Naji's blog and interviewing staff from *Akhbar al-Adab*' (Guyer 2017). On 31st October 2015, the prosecutor's office in Cairo filed legal charges against Naji and al-Taher for 'disturbing public morals'. The trial began on 14th November 2015. Whilst Naji's words above are hopeful for the outcome of the case and the positive impact that an acquittal might have on censorship laws and State media control in Egypt, he could not have foreseen the lengthy judicial process ahead of him.

Both Naji and al-Taher were acquitted in January 2016, but the prosecution appealed: the case was escalated to a higher Appeals Court where – on 20th February 2016 – both defendants received the maximum penalties: for al-Taher, a fine of 10,000 Egyptian pounds (equivalent to around £900), and for Naji, a two-year prison sentence. Naji was immediately detained, then transferred to Tora Prison. Over ten months, his defence team submitted three unsuccessful appeals. Finally, in December 2016, the Court of Cassation (the highest appeals court in Egypt) agreed to temporarily suspend Naji's prison sentence and he was released. In May 2017 his sentence was repealed, with a retrial ordered and a travel ban given to the author. Finally, on 30th May 2018, the retrial overturned Naji's sentence, lifted the travel ban, and instead issued him a fine of 20,000 Egyptian pounds (Hassanin 2018).

This article investigates the case of Ahmed Naji and his novel *Istikhdam al-Haya*. Since the legal case is founded on a morality charge, the article is also a study in the ethics of reading. It therefore possesses the same conviction as ethical criticism: that literary works have the capacity to evoke rich emotional and ethical responses (Booth 1983 [1961], 1988; Phelan 1996). The article has several additional disciplinary foundations. It is a piece of stylistics research, building on the discipline's existing critical strengths (cf. Jeffries 2010; Mills 1995; Simpson 1993). By examining a legal trial, the article also resonates with forensic linguistics research, similarly concerned with the role and evidential value of language in the context of legal cases (cf. Coulthard and Johnson 2007, 2010; McMenamim 1993, 2010). However, unlike forensic linguistics, this article takes a cognitive approach and, as such, has three principal influences. First, Hamilton (2011) has considered the cognitive process of writing and reading allegory which, he argues, can be used as a means of self-censorship on the part of writers. He does not, however, explore censorship within

forensic contexts. Contrastingly, in *On the Discourse of Satire*, Simpson investigates the 'Alan Clark vs. the *Evening Standard*' (1998) legal case and conceives of his approach as equally 'a study in forensic discourse analysis as an exercise in applied stylistics' (2003: 188). Simpson offers a comparative analysis of Alan Clarke's published diaries and the *Evening Standard*'s spoof alongside examination of the prosecution's and defense's legal arguments and the *Evening Standard*'s published commentary on the trial. Consequently, he considers several texts involved in and surrounding the trial. Similarly, in their study of footballer John Terry's alleged racist language, Gavins and Simpson (2015) examine a number of elements of the case, from the discursive interaction on the football pitch (based on the televised incident) to the Chief Magistrate's ruling. Gavins and Simpson's methodological approach is most valuable for this article since they combine traditional and cognitive stylistic analysis, in the process attending to modality, mind-modelling, and text-worlds, all of which are also used in this analysis and introduced later.

As in both Simpson's (2003) and Gavins and Simpson's (2015) studies, I analyse a system of related textual artefacts: the offended reader's complaint, the Egyptian legal framework, the prosecution's and defence's arguments, and the English translation of the excerpt from *Istikhdam al-Haya*. Like contextualised stylistics, my approach involves co-text and sociocultural context (Bex et al. 2000). However, since it displaces the literary text as primary focus and seeks to triangulate analyses of multiple source texts, I consider my approach herein to be a form of *situated* stylistic analysis (Gibbons and Whiteley 2018: 326-7) This entails examination of each textual artefact as a distinct discursive event as well as reading across and between texts in order to situate each within a larger network of textual and sociocultural exchanges. Fundamentally:

> Texts are situated in and structure social relations (extended social courses of action) in which people are actively at work. Texts enter into and order courses of action and relations among individuals. The texts themselves have a material presence and are produced in an economic and social process which is part of a political economy. (Smith 1998: 162)

In this view, the truly solipsistic reader is, strictly speaking, exceptional: reading is rarely an isolated, solitary experience but, rather, occurs within an everyday sociocultural context (involving knowledge gleaned from and responses influenced by a whole host of sources, such as other readers, paratextual information, and media, publishing and marketing materials), which necessarily comprises various cultures of interpretation. Like Proctor and Benwell, I thus also conceive of literary experiences as situated, precisely because when people respond to texts, their responses emerge from and in relation to the "specific conditions in which texts are read" (2015: 103). Relatedly, whilst texts occasion discursive roles such as 'writer' and 'reader', readers' personal identities and responses are part of the 'contingent, situated process' of reading (2015: 103).

Text World Theory, Deixis, and Projection

This article takes a Text World Theory approach to analysing Ahmed Naji's trial and the discriminatory practices therein. Text World Theory is a framework within cognitive stylistics, a discipline primarily concerned with the experiential dynamics of reading and responding to texts. Originally formulated by Werth (1999) and since refined, most prominently by Gavins (2007), the framework is designed to analyse how real people in real-world contexts conceptualise discourse. Text World Theory forms the foundation of my analysis since its enables clear, rigorous mappings of narrative ontologies and the possibilities for readers' psychological involvement, including ethical response.

In Text World Theory, the real-world is conceived as the *discourse-world*, which encapsulates a discursive context of communication and is populated by *participants*. In face-to-face encounters, there are at least two participants, talking within a shared discourse-world. The communicative context of a written work is a *split-discourse-world*: the writer exists in a different spatio-temporal

moment to any given reader. Each text in my analysis of the trial is therefore grounded in a unique discursive context and has its own corresponding discourse-world. Generating and/or processing language necessitates the creation of mental representations, known as *text-worlds*. Text-worlds are inhabited by *enactors*. The concept of enactor is not entirely synonymous with character for two reasons. Firstly, unlike characters, enactors do not have to be fictional in a strict sense: for example, Participant A could tell Participant B about a past experience so the version of Participant A in the tale is realised as an enactor in the text-world. Secondly, enactors are conceptual entities not stable characters, thus there can be multiple versions of the same designated character/person: in the example, the text-world enactor is a temporally-specific past version of Participant A.

Participants build text-worlds from linguistic features. These world-building elements are normally deictic. This is because deixis is central to the way in which discourse producers express positions in the world, grounded in space and time and in relation to other participants. To interpret deictic language, participants rely on embodied cognition which, in turn, facilitates a cognitive stance. Whether reading a text or engaged in conversation, participants must shift their cognitive stance from their egocentric position in the discourse-world into text-worlds through *deictic projection* (Duchan, Bruder, and Hewitt 1995; Stockwell 2002). Readers track the deictic parameters of text-worlds; thus, changes in these parameters trigger *world-switches* to text-worlds with different spatial, temporal, or perceptual boundaries or different ontological properties. Linguistic modality, for instance, creates text-worlds that express speakers' attitudes or judgements.

Pronouns and proper names – aspects of perceptual deixis – establish narrative voice and designate various narrative roles (Gibbons and Macrae 2018). The pronominal form used for the narrative voice, for instance, influences who appears to tell the story (diegesis), how connected that teller appears to the story, and how readers construe their own relationship with the teller(s) and the tale (Booth 1983 [1961]: 149-165). Third-person narration often has the effect of generating what Booth calls an 'undramatized narrator' thus making the story seem, to the reader, to be 'unmediated' (Booth 1983 [1961]: 151-2). In contrast, the use of narrative-*I* overtly signals an interactional context in which a narratee is implicitly or explicitly addressed. Furthermore, when narratorial address is explicit through the use of the second-person pronoun or in sustained second-person narration, readers may feel the 'involving, dialogical function of *you*' (Fludernik 1994: 469). *You* can also be unstable and multifunctional, thus creating subjective ambiguity (Fludernik 1994). Resultantly, Herman (2002: 345) has identified five types of textual *you*: (1) generalised *you*, referring to a plural second-person group; (2) fictional reference, designating an enactor in the text-world as would be the case with much second-person narration; (3) fictionalised horizontal address, where an enactor addresses another enactor using *you*; (4) apostrophic vertical address, which appears to speak to the real reader; (5) doubly deictic *you* whereby the reference of *you* is doubled to signify both a text-world enactor and a discourse-world participant. Depending on the type of *you* employed and on whether readers feel able to accept or share the identity of the *you*, readers may project into, and identify with, the *you* role in the text-world (Gavins 2007). Based on real reader responses, Whiteley (2011) proposes three modes of projection: *psychological projection* into the spatio-temporal parameters of the text-world; *perspective-taking* by attributing traits to enactors; and *self-implication*, involving reader's *identification* with a text-world enactor. The deictic composition of a literary text and the varying forms of projection available to readers is highly relevant to readers' ethical positionings.

Authors, Readers, and Ethical Positions

Present-day ethical criticism is founded on Wayne C. Booth's arguments, most notably in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983 [1961]) and *The Company We Keep* (1988). In the former, Booth put forward his concept of the implied author, a 'second self' (1983 [1961]: 71) of the real author, cognitively constructed by readers based on the text. Accordingly, readers' ethical responses are intimately tied to the implied author, since this mental construct is derived from a text's 'complete

artistic whole', including 'the moral and emotional content of each bit of action and suffering of the characters' (1983 [1961]: 73). Both in the Afterword to the second edition of *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and in *The Company We Keep*, Booth recognises the worth of analyses that 'attempt to account for the full range of beliefs and values' implied by the text and thus available to readers (1983 [1961]: 423). To this end, he draws on and relates his own ideas to Rabinowitz's identification of three levels of reader response, referred to as 'audience roles' (see 1977, 1987). These, too, underpin rhetorical narratology, wherein Phelan argues that the experience of reading is 'multilayered' and therefore successful ethical criticism must 'account for the multiple layers of our responses' (1996: 90). Expanding on Booth's and Rabinowitz's thinking, Phelan (2007) ultimately employs five audience roles: the actual reader; the authorial audience (an author's ideal reader); the narrative audience, observing the narrative world; the narratee, who is addressed by the narrator; and the ideal narrative audience (a narrator's ideal addressee). In relation to these roles, readers take up *positions*, which Phelan explains as 'a concept that combines *acting from* and *being placed* in an ethical location' (Phelan 2001: 95; original emphasis).

Phelan's notion of reader positioning is employed in cognitive stylistic accounts of the ethics of reading, all of which use Text World Theory (Stockwell 2009, 2013; Whiteley 2010, 2014; Nuttall 2017). In *Texture*, Stockwell traces the ethical positions of the reader relative to enactors. When readers are required to successively shift psychologically in relation to enactors' perspectives and knowledge, Stockwell suggests using the concept of 'enactor' to also account for reader's projected positioning (2009: 165-6). Problematically, though, this risks confusing the ontological boundaries between discourse-world and text-world beings. Stockwell's use of 'enactor' is additionally atypical here because (unlike in the above example of the past enactor of Participant A) an enactor of the reader is not explicitly constructed by the language of the text. This seems somewhat at odds with his later argument in 'The positioned reader' (2013) that the deictic composition of a text provides preferred ethical positions for readers (though other, less preferred, ethical positions are also possible). Stockwell's analyses in 'The positioned reader' certainly demonstrate the centrality of deictic composition for readers' psychological projection, emotional responses, and possible ethical positionings. However, he prioritises deictic parameters mostly without explicitly connected these to audience roles. This neglects the ontological implications of ethical responses.

Whiteley uses reading group data to track deictic projection and psychological relationships with textual entities. Initially focussing on emotion (2010), she draws on all five audience roles from rhetorical narratology but later, when reorienting her analysis to ethics (2014), she focuses only on narratee and implied reader. Nevertheless, Whiteley finds that real readers' ethical positionings correlate with emotional engagement or what she discusses as the identifying or dissociating currents of the subjective roles in the text. Cognitive science also shows that emotional response is often at the root of moral and ethical reactions (Colm Hogan 2008). Like Whiteley, Nuttall uses real reader data (though from online website Goodreads) and, like both Stockwell and Whiteley, her analysis links deictic composition to ethical response. Nuttall contends that narratological and stylistic accounts of ethics require further development in order to evidence at what narrative level, and in relation to whom, a reader's given ethical position occurs. Nuttall's solution is to employ the concept of construal from cognitive grammar (Langacker 2008) in order to map readers' shifting attention in relation to another five narrative roles – characters, narrator and narratee, writer and reader(s) – thus reducing the number of audience roles considered but adding writers and narrators. Nuttall's consideration of the reader(s) role is particularly significant, since her empirical data shows that reader's ethical positions arise not only in relation to the text itself but also in reaction to those expressed by other readers online. However, using construal to reveal readers' shifting attention to narrative roles, as Nuttall herself acknowledges (2017: 166), diminishes the ontological boundaries between worlds and narrative levels.

The boundaries between worlds, particularly between discourse-world and text-worlds, are important, since ethical responses can have real-world effects as, indeed, trials of literary morality demonstrate. The ontological differences between text-world entities and discourse-world

participants are crucial in order to distinguish between the actions and held beliefs of enactors and the actions and held beliefs of real people, such as authors. In the next section, I seek to advance analysis of the ethics of reading within a Text World Theory framework that upholds ontological boundaries.

Text-Worlds, Ethics, and the Narrative Roles of Literary Reading

In Figure 1, I offer a model of the various narrative roles involved in literary reading which: maintains a rigorous system of world-ontology; explicitly recognises that ethical responses are the result of communicative interactions between enunciators (from whom discourse appears to emanate) and receivers; and can account for cultural difference. Such a model is not without precedent: as well as Rabinowitz's and Phelan's typologies of audience roles, Booth (1983 [1961]: 428-431) attempted to classify roles of authors and readers, though he admits that his efforts are not necessarily systematic or complete (427). I therefore do not claim to be the first to attempt such a project nor to introduce each narrative role to Text World Theory and/or ethical criticism. However, my diagrammatic model maps these roles in greater schematic detail than previous accounts.

The model is multidimensional and explicitly maps the ontological border between discourse-world and text-worlds as well as narrative levels in which multiple text-worlds can be generated. At the bottom of Figure 1 is the typically split discourse-world of literary reading, encompassing the discourse roles of real writer and real reader(s). I have deliberately pluralised the latter to allow for the possibility of discourse-world interactions with other readers since such interactions have been shown to influence reader response (Phelan, 2005: 19; Whiteley 2011; Nuttall 2017). All subsequent roles exist within text-world ontologies, since they do not designate actual, flesh-and-blood people. The model is based fundamentally on the dialogic principles of communicative interaction, showing roles of enunciation (from which discourse is or appears to be produced) on the left and roles of reception on the right. The receiver roles are extracted from Text World Theory and rhetorical narratology, though I have modified the names used in the latter for clarity and comparability. The text-world roles are positioned in Figure 1 to show their phenomenological proximity or distance, as felt by participants relative to their discourse-world. Participants conceptualise text-world roles by 'mind-modelling' their motivations, beliefs, moral positions, and perspectives (Stockwell 2009). This mind-modelling process is an act of social cognition; thus, the roles and the narrative contexts in which they occur prime cognitive behaviours and imply preferred 'situationally determined' responses (Fiske and Taylor 1991: 412).

Figure 1: Text World Theory Model of the Narrative Roles of Literary Reading
(developed from Phelan 1996, 2007; Rabinowitz 1977, 1987; Whiteley 2010, 2011)
[Figure 1 should be inserted approximately here]

The authorial or ideal writer is an implied or hypothetical cognitive construct: a mind-model substituting for the real author. Comparably, the authorial or ideal reader is a role modelled by the real reader based on how they think the writer wants readers to respond to the text (and is therefore developed from their model of the authorial writer). The story appears to emanate from the narrator. Although a narrator can be undramatised, this role is most apparent to readers when it is textually encoded and/or when address is directed towards a narratee, either implicitly or explicitly (e.g. 'you', 'reader'). The ideal narratee is the narrator's inferred ideal recipient who would 'understand every nuance of his communication' (Phelan 2003: 210). Above is the narrative observer, a position for which there is no dialogic companion since this is a role that the reader experiences through what Whiteley (2011) calls psychological projection (discussed earlier). Finally, seemingly at the furthest remove from the discourse-world, are enactors: readers can psychologically position themselves relative to enactors through perspective-taking or self-implication (Whiteley 2011). Not all roles are textual encoded in the same way. Considering reception roles, for instance, whilst enactors and explicit narratees can be named, referenced, and addressed, the authorial reader is

instead inferred by the real reader based on the totality of the text and their extra-textual knowledge. Readers can therefore self-implicate with all reception roles, but only track the deictic coordinates of roles when they are textually encoded.

While readers will not be conscious of each and all of these roles in any given moment of reading (cf. Booth 1988: 126; the distinction between reading and analysis emphasised by Stockwell 2013: 264-266), it is nevertheless important to account for them. As Booth argues, in his own discussion of narrative roles and responses (Booth 1988: 125-155), the various roles and responses possible in literary communication 'can not be ignored in ethical criticism, because each of these authors and readers, tellers and listeners, has a different character from all the others and each will *respond to*, and thus be *responsible to*, a richer set of characters than is suggested by most ethical criticism' (Booth 1988: 126).

Mondal has criticised Phelan's rhetorical formulation of narrative ethics for assuming 'a shared cultural frame of reference' (2014: 88), questioning (2014:87):

> what if […] a particular interpretative community does *not* share "the beliefs and knowledge the author assumes it has"? What if, in certain cases, these assumptions are symptomatic of a violation of the otherness of these readers that is encoded in the textual invitation itself?

My model, which builds on previous ethical criticism in both rhetorical narratology and – in these circumstances, more significantly – cognitive stylistics, can resolve Mondal's concern precisely because it enables a three-part analysis: (1) the identification of ontological level and narrative role(s); (2) the mind-model (including the associated moral and cultural values) constructed for each role; and (3), following Stockwell (2013), preferred and dispreferred ethical responses (thus sharing or rejecting values) associated with that mind-model/role. Readers are under no obligation to project into any role or to accept any preferred ethical response. They take up (preferred or dispreferred) positions in relation to each narrative role (with horizontal dialogic pairs often functioning in tandem); such positions can be identifying or dissociating, or indeed fluctuate between experiences. Mind-modelling and positioning function together as part of a situated experience of reading: readers mind-model narrative roles along with the situationally determined values they elicit within the wider social context of their reading (including their interactions with other readers and/or extratextual knowledge and experiences), negotiating their own identities in relation to these roles and values.

I now turn to the analysis of Ahmed Naji's case. After citing some precedents from literary history, the analysis begins by considering Tawfik's initial complaint and the Egyptian legal framework that enabled the case to go to court.

Taking Offense and The Legality of Public Morality in Egypt

The morality charge in Ahmed Naji's case is not without precedent: literary works have historically been recast as battlegrounds for moral debates. In nineteenth century France, *Madame Bovary* was similarly the subject of a morality trial. As with *Istikhdam al-Haya*, *Madame Bovary* was extracted in a literary magazine – *La Revue de Paris* – leading to the prosecution of Gustave Flaubert as author as well as the owner and the printer of the magazine. All three were acquitted. *Madame Bovary* is consequently seen as one of the 'milestones of literary censorship' in the West, a history Peters (2006) traces to twentieth century instantiations such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* and Allen Ginsberg's *Howl and Other Poems*. *Howl* has actually been cited as a point of comparison with *Istikhdam al-Haya*, under the implicit optimism that Naji's case would produce a comparable relaxation of censorship laws (Ahmed Nada ctd. in Koerber 2016). Certainly, there are parallels between legal arguments in the trials of *Howl* and *Istikhdam al-Haya*, as will be explicated in my analysis. Although one could cite a plethora of censorship cases from the Arab world (see Jacquemond 2008; Mehrez 2008; Stagh 1993), there are fewer 'milestones' that overcome legal

prosecution. Elmasry notes that 'for most of its history, Egypt has been plagued by a censorial press culture, with ruling regimes exerting near-complete control over the news system' (2017: 178) whilst Lesch offers recent examples of state action against cultural products such as newspapers, TV programs, and radio stations, and figures including newspaper columnists, journalists, and TV hosts (2017: 153-4).

The case against Naji was instigated by the formal complaint of one reader. Tawfik's act of complaining, through legal processes, performs the 'situated identity' (Zimmerman 1998) of citizen-censor in this discourse-world context. The police statement recording Tawfik's complaint reportedly details that, on reading the excerpt from *Istikhdam al-Haya*, 'his heartbeat fluctuated, his blood pressure dropped and he became severely ill' (Guyer 2017; Pepe 2015b). Tawfik's (dispreferred) response, suggesting he suffered physical affliction, is not dissimilar from the characterisation of hate speech. As Butler notes, discussions of 'wounding words' tend to 'combine linguistic and physical vocabularies' (1997: 4). In the text-world created by the police statement, Tawfik is therefore represented as a physically debilitated enactor.

Ahmed Naji and Tarek al-Taher were tried under Article 178 of the Egyptian penal code (The University of Minnesota Human Rights Library, no date):

> Whoever makes or holds, for the purpose of trade, distribution, leasing, pasting or displaying printed matter, manuscripts, drawings, advertisements, carved or engraved pictures, manual or photographic drawings, symbolic signs, or other objects or pictures in general, if they are against public morals, shall be punished with detention for a period not exceeding two years and a fine of no less than five thousand pounds and not exceeding ten thousand pounds or either penalty.

In its expression of power and accountability, Article 178 is replete with ambiguity. The responsibility for the morality of a work seems to be located with writers/producers and/or facilitators/distributors ('Whoever makes or holds'). However, while producers are obliged to create works that do not go 'against public morals', how such 'morals' are to be distinguished or interpreted is somewhat vague, defined only by the premodifying adjective 'public'. Such morality is therefore simultaneously indeterminate whilst being subject to determination on an ad hoc basis by the malleability of public, civilian judgement. Consequently, whilst writers/producers bear the ethical burden of their work, their own intentionality is disregarded in an imprecise account of morality that sites power in reception. Furthermore, Article 178 assumes homogeneity of public opinion with the censoring subject, and therefore discounts the relativity and situatedness of the moral, cultural, and ethical values of potential readers.

The online Egyptian news source *Mada Masr* reported that, when Naji and el-Taher were originally acquitted in January 2016, 'the court had said the penal code is too rigid to apply to matters of self expression, and determined a lack of malicious intention from Naji' (Mada Masr 2016). Notwithstanding the wording of Article 178, the ruling overlooks public perceptions of morality, instead taking an interpretive stance on author intentionality. Consequently, the court's judgement was reliant upon mind-modelling Ahmed Naji in the form of authorial or ideal writer, in order to decide whether he deliberately sought to cause offense.

Literary Morality and The Arabic Concept of *Adab*

The moral emphasis of Article 178 might seem somewhat alien to contemporary Western cultures but in the Arab World, morality is fundamentally intertwined with the conception of literature. In modern standard Arabic, the word used to designate 'literature' is '*adab*'. Despite the contemporary transliteration, the equivalence is not straightforward. Words such as *adab* are 'history-loaded': a one-to-one correspondence of meaning cannot be assumed, because linguistic concepts carry 'the specificities' of 'different *cultures* and *civilisations*' (Guth 2010: 9; original emphasis). Historically,

adab designated non-religious but nevertheless educational texts, which communicated didactic or disciplinary messages of '(mostly) secular norms of conduct' and '(ethical) normativity' (Pepe 2015a: 75). Such works were also expected to conform both to 'linguistic norms, such as those governing purity and correctness' and literary norms, 'such as the rules governing the prosody of classical poetry' (Jacquemond 2008: 9). It was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that literary works came to be included within the concept of *adab*. Thus, 'the conception of *adab* [is] still largely informed by classical Arab culture' and accordingly, 'has a dual meaning, having both a moral component, in the sense of "well-mannered," or "polite," and a cultural one having to do with a body of written work as a whole' (Jacquemond 2008: 9). Jacquemond explicitly links the cultural heritage of the word *adab* with censorship, arguing that it is through 'drawing on this long-standing semantic link between *adab* as literature and *adab* as morality that censors of every type have continued to criticize literary works up until today' (2008: 9).

The cultural heritage of the concept of *adab* evidently forms part of the belief system of Egyptian participants. Speaking in interview, Tawfik explicitly cites *adab* (Guyer 2017; ellipses used to extract journalistic asides, e.g. 'he says'):

> If you come into my house, you need to have good morals when you are entering […] I don't care if others would buy or approve of it, but if you come into my house you can't say such vulgar things. You can write anything, and I have the right to reject it or accept it. But this kind of official newspaper enters my house under the banner of *adab*. […] I am refusing what is written.

As Figure 2 shows, the hypotheticality of the conjunction 'if' immediately creates a hypothetical text-world. The initial 'text-world level of the discourse' is therefore, at this stage, 'an empty text-world' which 'falls quickly into the background' (Gavins 2007: 133). The hypothetical text-world (of the repeated subordinate clause 'If you come into my house') presents a metaphorical house which functions as a defence for Tawfik's actions with his ownership – signalled by possessive 'my' – acting a means of validating his personal values. The use of first-person creates an enactor of Tawfik in the text-world whilst textual *you* is doubly-deictic since it acts both as generalised *you* and (because of the discourse-world context in which Tawfik is discussing his reaction to the extract and role in the trial) fictionalised horizontal address. With regards to the latter, horizontal *you* – through a metonymic extension of and association with *Istikhdam al-Haya* – invokes an enactor who represents the authorial writer of Ahmed Naji. Moreover, in the metaphor, this *you* is cast as a badly behaved guest.

Figure 2: Text World Structure for Tawfik's Hypothetical House
[Figure 2 should be inserted approximately here]

A sequence of world-switches (marked 'WS' in Figure 2) result from Tawfik's modalised and negated statements, generating subsequent text-worlds which express his attitudes. In these worlds, the conceptual influence of *adab* is apparent: there is a deontic text-world ('need') in which guests, referenced as 'you', 'have good morals', whilst Tawfik's stance against literary-linguistic impurity is marked by the euphemistic noun phrases 'vulgar things' and 'such words' as well as the verb choice in 'can't say' which reframes the excerpt as speech (a colloquial form with lower cultural capital) in a negative text-world. Whilst *you* continues to be doubly-deictic, Tawfik's implicit commentary on free speech and his reference to the act of writing in the epistemic text-world for 'You can write anything' compellingly foregrounds the enactor representing Ahmed Naji as authorial writer as the primary referent of *you*. Therefore, although this representation of Naji is a text-world enactor, Tawfik's articulation seems to be a motivated attempt to respond to Naji. Indeed, for Tawfik, the ontological separation between Naji in his mind-model of the authorial writer and as the real flesh-and-blood author are likely to be indistinguishable. Such a conflation is, perhaps, a default in everyday reading. Nevertheless, the refusal to decouple authorial writer and real author is marked in this context because it wilfully assigns blame.

In ‘I have the right…’ Tawfik reasserts his own power – as the offended censor – in another deontic text-world. Furthermore, Tawfik’s acknowledgement, albeit dismissively, of the ‘others’ who ‘would buy or approve’ makes apparent that he also conceives of authorial readers, an idealised readership for Naji’s text. The text-world location of these ‘others’ is significant: ontologically, their purchase or approval is placed at several removes from Tawfik, couched successively in negative, hypothetical, and epistemic text-worlds.

The Text World structure highlights that Tawfik presents his own attitudes and mind-models the authorial writer and his authorial, ideal readers. Significantly, he does so through hypothetical, modal, and negative worlds that are consequently ontologically distanced from him both as a text-world enactor in the initial text-world and by extension as a real reader in the discourse-world of the interview. In contrast, Tawfik’s concluding words, ‘I am refusing what is written’ (represented in the top-left emboldened text-world), return to the initial text-world, transforming its emptiness, and asserting his own ethical resistance as an enactor within a text-world that is temporally, phenomenologically, and ontologically more proximal to the discourse-world.

Akhbar al-Adab is not a free circular: it must be purchased from a newsstand or paid for by subscription. In the original trial, Tawfik reportedly told the prosecution that ‘he buys the journal regularly for his daughters, but that one time, his wife walked into the room showing him [Naji’s] published chapter and ridiculing him for bringing it into their home’ (Naji in Kareem 2016). This sheds light on how *Akhbar al-Adab* entered Tawfik’s house as well as on the reading situation. Tawfik’s wife’s ‘ridiculing’ indicates a strong dispreffered response to the sexual depictions in, and inferred values of, the extract and therefore also a rejection of the authorial reader role. Moreover, this communication between Tawfik and his wife represents, as in Proctor and Benwell’s discussion of moral stances in reading groups, ‘a situated type of talk which governs the presentation of readers’ own identities and simultaneously prescribes and reinforces ideal values for membership of this particularly community of practice’ (2015: 181). In her study of online readers, Nuttall presents linguistic evidence that reader responses are not only influenced by those of fellow readers but that readers often take ethical positions in relation to those already articulated by other readers (2017: 167-8). It is likely, therefore, that Tawfik’s response to *Istikhdam al-Haya* – as well as his mind-models of the authorial writer and authorial ideal readers – was influenced by his wife’s ridicule, prior to his own reading of the excerpt. As Benwell, Proctor, and Robinson (2011) have shown, the act of not reading can itself function as an expression of personal and social identity, as well as a form of moral or ethical positioning. If Tawfik did go on to read the extract, he was probably predisposed to resist or dissociate from the authorial, ideal reader role.

Using Life and *Adab*-icity*:* The Trials of Writing and Reading Sex

To further reflect on the influence of Egyptian cultural notions of *adab* on ethical responses to *Istikhdam al-Haya*, I draw on Pepe’s study of the literariness and ‘*adab*-icity’ of autofictional blogs, in which she attends to three features each from Western and Arabic literary traditions (2012: 535), presented in Table 1. In the current and next section of this article, I analyse the English translation of the excerpt from Naji’s novel. Here, I focus on the features of *adab*-icity and how the so-called ‘vulgar’ language influences readers’ mind-models. In the next section, I explore literariness, considering fictionality and the self-referentiality of language through a focus on pronoun usage.

Table 1: Dimensions of literariness or ‘*adab*-icty’
(based on Pepe 2012: 535)

***ADAB*-ICITY**
• ‘pleasant’ language • ‘polite’ • didactic purpose or commitment to higher cause
LITERARINESS

- fictionality
- presence of a plot
- self-referentiality of language

The prosecution built its attack on the moral propriety of *Istikhdam al-Haya* – and by extension, Naji – by emphasising the presence of 'vulgar' language. In the police report, Tawfik implies that his offence arose from impure language communicating impolite subject matter: 'Because it contains sentences and expressions that are sexually explicit, it caused me psychological harm' (Guyer 2016). The presence of 'sexually explicit' content, alongside depictions of smoking and drinking, contradicts the didactic or normative morality inherent in the classical conception of *adab*.

Naji revealed some of the words specifically objected to by the prosecution (in Kareem 2016); I have emboldened these in the following quotations from the translation of *Istikhdam al-Haya*. The first taboo word is part of direct speech. The narrator-protagonist is at a party when the conversation turns to sex: ' "Did you know there's a kind of sexual fetish called '**licking** the pupil'?" says the German girl in English' (Naji 2017: 118). The narrator-protagonist subsequently wonders (2017: 118):

> What are your typical twenty-somethings to do in Cairo? Might they go for pupil **licking**? Are they into eating **pussy**? Do you like to **suck cock**, or **lick** dirt, or snort hash mixed with sleeping pills? Or one might ask how long it would take for any of these fetishes to lose its thrill. Are they good for life?

The next day, Bassam meets with his lover – nicknamed Lady Spoon – and, in her apartment, they have sex (Naji 2017: 120-1):

> I gave her knee a parting kiss, and continued my tongue's journey up her thigh. I planted a kiss, soft as a butterfly, on her thinly lined underwear and pulled it away with my hands. I plunged my tongue into her **pussy**. I drank a lot that night. I drank until I felt thirsty. I gave her a full ride with my tongue before she took me into her room, where we had slow and leisurely sex. She turned over, and I put my fingers in her mouth. Wet with her saliva, I stuck them in her **pussy**. Slipping and sliding. I stuck them in from behind. I grabbed her short hair and pulled it towards me. I humped her violently and then lay on top of her for a few seconds. I got out of bed and threw the condom into the trash.

In addition to emboldened words, there are other phrases that might be offensive to readers, such as euphemistic descriptions of sex as a 'full ride' and oral sex as 'drinking'. Even so, as the defence attorney of the *Howl* case argues, 'individual words in and of themselves do not make obscene books' (Morgan and Peters 2006: 130). Rather they are context dependent. The emboldened words are all used within text-world ontologies; that is, by an enactor ('the German girl') in speech or by the intradiegetic narrator. These ontological complexities will be discussed further, alongside pronoun usage, in the next section.

The majority of the clauses in Bassam's description of the sexual act feature the first-person male narrator ('*I*') as the subject of verbs which often signify violent action: 'plunged', 'planted', 'stuck', 'grabbed', 'pulled', 'humped', the latter emphasised by the adverb 'violently'. Moreover, Lady Spoon – often reductively represented by her body parts – is repeatedly an object, acted upon. In comparison, Lady Spoon is the subject of only two clauses, 'She turned over' and 'She took me into her room'; in the latter, the narrator is the object. On one hand, then, the description of sex between Bassam and Lady Spoon might be construed as misogynistic; on the other, the primacy of the male enactor as acting subject might simply reflect the focalisation of the encounter from the first-person narrator's perspective. Notably, 'we had slow and leisurely sex' is the only clause that includes both Bassam and Lady Spoon as joint subjects, sharing agency between male and female

enactors and – regardless of the rest of the passage – representing sex as consensual. As such, Naji's presentation of the sexual act is ideologically ambiguous. Phelan notes, authorial writers 'who stop short of conveying their own ethical judgement of an action that is central to the narrative are doing something extraordinarily unusual—and extraordinarily risky' (2001: 97). Such ambivalence risks alienating readers and problematizing their identification of the ethical values of a narrative role.

These brief passages from the translation of *Istikhdam al-Haya* make obvious that the extract does not conform to the three features of *adab*-icity: both the lexical choices and descriptions of sexual acts are unlikely to be deemed polite or committed to a higher moral stance. Mondal observes (2014: 78):

> authors make certain textual choices which they feel to be appropriate to the matter they wish to treat. But the transactional nature of the literary encounter means that the 'propriety' of their choices […] is not a matter of their judgement alone.

Naji's choices contribute to the portrayal of a particular youth experience in contemporary Cairo and as well as form part of readers' mind-models of both the authorial writer and his ideal authorial reader. Whilst some readers, including some Egyptian readers, would have no problem reading the extract, not all readers will find this rendering unproblematic because of the depiction of sex and the so-called 'vulgar' language. Acceptance of this language thus becomes a key feature of readers' mind-model for the authorial, ideal reader and therefore also for the preferred ethical position associated with this narrative role. The 'psychological harm' that Tawfik claims to have experienced suggests an intense mismatch between his own moral, cultural values and those he models for the authorial reader, provoking him to take a strongly dispreferred ethical stance.

The defence's counter argument referenced the history of Arabic Literature, whereby sex or erotica fill the pages of canonical works such as *The Thousand and One Nights*, itself once a banned work in the US (Peters 2000: 9). It seems paradoxically striking that Naji's novel was never banned (particularly given precedent in Egypt). Throughout the trial and Naji's imprisonment, Arabic readers could (and still can) buy a copy of *Istikhdam al-Haya* at Cairo booksellers and street vendors. Ironically, they can just as easily buy *Fifty Shades of Grey* (Guyer 2016), though not in Arabic translation (an interesting fact that might have implications for perceptions of linguistic cultures, relative to *adab*-icity). However *adab* is interpreted, the continued public availability of *Using Life*, the precedent of erotica in Arabic literary history, and the sexual explicitness of available Western texts exposes an incongruity within the prosecution's case.

Using Life and Literariness: The Trials of Using Fiction

Another argument made by the prosecution was that *Istikhdam al-Haya* was autobiographical – a claim also made about Ginsberg's *Howl* (Morgan and Peters 2006: 175-6). Naji was consequently threatened with further charges for 'dealing with hashish' (Pen America). Naji explains: 'According to their investigations and official documents, my fiction registers as a confession to having had sex with [Lady Spoon], from kissing her knees all the way to taking off the condom' (Kareem 2016). The defence attempted to counter by calling expert witnesses – head of the Arab Writer's Union, novelist Mohamed Salamawi and former minister of Culture Sonallah Ibrahim – to testify that *Istikhdam al-Haya* is a work of fiction.

Both the Arabic and the English versions of *Istikhdam al-Haya/Using Life* bear the subtitle *riwāya/A Novel*. *Akhbar al-Adab*, in which the excerpt from *Istikhdam al-Haya* was published, though, comprises an array of genres:

> Poetry, short stories, and excerpts from novels by both prominent and emerging writers appeared on the newspaper's pages alongside criticism, reviews, book announcements,

> gossip, interviews, coverage of cultural events, and longer articles concerning cultural figures and debates from Egypt, the Arab World, and around the globe. (Linthicum 2017: 229-30)

Nevertheless, the excerpt was printed in the *Ibda* (Creativity) section (Pepe 2015b), thus paratextual markers foregrounded its fictionality. Tawfik's expectations about the magazine and its relative fictionality are somewhat unclear; he says, 'This is not a sexy magazine or something like that […] I don't want it to get into my house through an official newspaper' (Guyer 2016). Although Tawfik knows that *Akhbar al-Adab* is not a 'sexy magazine', his alternative description of it as an 'official newspaper' suggests a conception of content which possesses a relationship with and an obligation to reality and factuality.

The extract from *Using Life* starts (2017: 117):

> That's not to say life in Cairo was completely miserable. There were good times to be had year round: some during our long summers, and quite a few during our short winters. Such times were, invariably, either days off work or days without it. The city rotates and revolves. The city branches out. The city beats, the city bleeds.

The opening paragraph uses possessive plural 'our' to indicate the presence of a narrator as well as a narratee or narratees in the sense of a larger social group who have experienced Cairo's seasonal weather. The parallel descriptions of the city add rhythm to the text and inscribe a linguistic self-referentiality that can be related to literariness. At this early point in the extract, the lack of specificity signalled by 'our' and the real-world referent for Cairo allow for an autobiographical interpretation, in line with the principle of minimal departure whereby readers assume, unless textual markers suggest otherwise, that a text-world is like the real-world (Ryan, 1991; Gavins 2007: 12).

In the second paragraph, as elsewhere in the extract, second-person *you* is deployed. The first instance of *you* is 'That's how it all looks, if you're an eagle soaring up above' (Naji 2017: 117). Here, and throughout the second paragraph, *you* is either generalised or a self-reflexive fictional reference. A first-person narrator is introduced in the third paragraph. Interestingly, *Madame Bovary* initially has a first-person narrator, but one who remains anonymous, enabling an interpretation of the narrator as a moral proxy for the author (Flaubert). LaCapra has additionally suggested that the subsequent predominantly free indirect style of *Madame Bovary* creates 'both proximity and distance—empathy and irony—in the relation of the narrator to the character or narrated objects' (1982: 59); it 'unsettles the moral security of the reader and renders decisive judgment about characters or story difficult to attain' (1982: 60). Contrastingly, the first-person narrator of *Istikhdam al-Haya* is (in the direct speech of an enactor named Kiko at the aforementioned party) addressed as 'Bassam', thus diminishing an autobiographical interpretation. The subsequent sexual encounter with Lady Spoon is relayed through Bassam's first-person narration, making readers' ethical responses towards the sexual act dependent on the degree of their deictic projection relative to the enactor (at the furthest remove as an narrative observer or at the most psychologically engaged through self-implication with Bassam) and their mind-model of this character. Ultimately, though, the ethical responsibility of the actions and opinions of 'I' are anchored to Bassam, whose onomastic distinctness from Ahmed Naji signals the ontological separation of discourse-world writer and text-world narrator-enactor.

The party conversation involves the afore-quoted "Did you know there's a kind of sexual fetish called 'licking the pupil'?" and prompts Bassam's narratorial questions 'Do you like to suck cock […]?'. In both, *you* is fictionalised address, between diegetic enactors in the former and between the intradiegetic narrator to an explicit *you* narratee in the latter. Given the phenomenological proximity of the narratee role with the authorial reader role, it is possible that real readers might feel addressed by the narrator. In Kacandes words, as the addressee of the narrator, 'one is positioned to feel the emotional force of the relationship that is created between the "I" and "you"' (2001: 179). Furthermore, readers must build a mind-model of the narratee *you*

based on the narrator's question. In her analysis of second-person fiction, Gavins has suggested that readers either feel that the described *you* has similar traits so they can self-implicate into the *you* role or, if they cannot overcome the difference between themselves and the *you*, they will still – necessarily – 'follow the invited projection in the text-world and inhabit the deictic centre' without identifying with the *you* enactor (2007: 86). This would mean that when the narrator asks 'Do you like to suck cock […]?' readers deictically take up the narratee *you* role even if they do not identify with it. As such, they will feel at least partially addressed by the question and be motivated to take a personalised ethical stance, whether preferred or dispreferred, in relation to both the question itself and their mind-model for the *you* narratee.

In the extract, then, both second-person and first-person pronouns place readers, at times, in ethically compromising situations. The narratorial address to *you* invites the reader to project into the narratee role and engage in a conversation about sexual practices whilst the use of *I* in the description of sex compels readers to take a psychological position in the text-world (as narrative observer, through perspective-taking or self-implication). Phelan suggests that *you* causes readers' positionings to fluctuate 'sometimes coinciding (and feeling addressed), sometimes observing from some emotional, ethical and/or psychological distance' (1996: 151). The perceptual dynamics of the extract (which includes both *I* and *you*) locate and shift readers across narrative levels in the text-world ontology and bear consequences for readers' ethical responses, particularly in relation to the chapter's sexual content.

Istikhdam al-Haya possesses all three features of literariness: paratextual markers and character names signal fictionality, narrative actions shows plot progression, and linguistic parallelism and the varied use of pronouns exhibits linguistic self-consciousness. While *you* might, at times, make readers feel *as though* they are addressed by text-world enactors, the distinctness of Bassam from Naji in name clearly signals the ontological separation of text-world enactor and discourse-world writer. Disregarding the novel's literariness is therefore a resistant – or at the very least, counter-intuitive – mode of reading. The defence's interpretation of the extract as autobiography is therefore a discriminatory misconstrual (wilful or inadvertent) that collapses ontologies. This disintegration of the boundaries between narrative roles re-locates the moral, cultural values that should be modelled for Bassam onto the authorial author, who is then further conflated with discourse participant and real writer Ahmed Naji.

Conclusions and Reflections on Freedom of Expression in Contemporary Egypt

This article provides a situated cognitive stylistic investigation of the case of Ahmed Naji who was prosecuted for using 'vulgar' language and 'disturbing public morals' by depicting sexual scenes in his novel *Istikhdam al-Haya*. I have presented a detailed model of the narrative roles involved in literary reading and, building on existing ethical criticism, argued that ethical positions are the combined result of deictic patterns in texts, mind-models of narrative roles, and the situated extratextual experiences and personal moral values readers bring with them. The model delineates the roles available to readers in greater schematic detail than has hitherto been drawn, maintaining a rigorous system of world-ontology and recognising that – across any singular literary experience – ethical responses are dialogic, multidimensional, and fluctuating.

My analysis charted Tawfik's self-reported characterisation of his reading experience as violent and traumatic and his ethical positioning in relation to Naji's novel. The highly charged context of Tawfik's reading, his wife 'ridiculing' him, intimates that he was probably inclined to read *Istikhdam al-Haya* resistantly. Furthermore, Tawfik's own words demonstrate not only that he mind-modelled the authorial writer and the novel's authorial, ideal readership; Tawfik's act of 'refusing' highlighted his own dissociative stance. Additionally, I illustrated that whilst *Istikhdam al-Haya* rebels against all three classical features of *adab*-icity, it does exhibit all three features of literariness. This offers motive for Tawfik's dispreferred ethical response on one hand and, on the other hand, conflicts with the prosecution's denial of fictionality in their claim that *Istikhdam al-*

Haya is Naji's autobiography. My analysis thus raises questions over the legitimacy of the charges brought against Naji and al-Taher. Naji is not only a novelist, but also a journalist and prolific blogger. Across these contexts, Naji's writing has been outspoken and critical of president Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's regime, lamenting the lack of support for the arts (2014d), the bureaucratic processes that stifle freedom of expression (2014b), and calling el-Sisi out as a tyrannical leader (2014c). Consequently, Naji's imprisonment seems indicative of more widespread suppression of free speech in the Arab world.

In Egypt, when el-Sisi came to power in 2012, no journalists were serving jail sentences; the 2016 prison census showed Egypt with the third highest number of journalists in jail, only below China and Turkey (CPJ 2016). Naji's case is particularly unique, precisely because he is a novelist. In fact, the judges of both his original acquittal and successful appeal cited Article 67 of Egypt's Constitution, adapted in 2014, which explicitly protects 'Artistic and literary creation' (Constitute 2017):

> Freedom of artistic and literary creation is guaranteed. The state shall undertake to promote art and literature, sponsor creators and protect their creations, and provide the necessary means of encouragement to achieve this end.
> No lawsuits may be initiated or filed to suspend or confiscate any artistic, literary, or intellectual work, or against their creators except through the public prosecution. No punishments of custodial sanction may be imposed for crimes committed because of the public nature of the artistic, literal or intellectual project. […]

Mendus has argued that free speech is only justified if it 'enhances rather than thwarts the possibilities of communication between different people' (1993: 205). The prosecution's attack on Naji appears to wilfully obstruct communication: their arguments entailed a lack of respect for moral and cultural difference as well as a disavowal of the ontological distinctness of the intradiegetic narrator-enactor from the authorial author, and most troublingly, the real author in the discourse-world.

Tawfik has claimed, 'I'm not against Ahmed Naji personally. I'm against him entering my house with such words' (Guyer 2016); Naji similarly stated, 'I do not have a problem with the reader or his behavior and complaint. I actually apologize to him for the inconvenience I caused for their marriage' (Kareem 2016). If these declarations are genuine, they gesture towards the potential for open communication. Writing after release from prison, Naji reflects on the support he received from the global literary community (2016):

> this solidarity wasn't just about my own sorry person or *Using Life* but about people's determination to live in a healthier society with a minimum of freedom of opinion and expression. It was also coming from people who are passionate about literature and who truly believe that literature can transcend national and ethnic borders. I never imagined that these people were so many, so concerned, so enthusiastic about the possibility of self-expression and about our love for literature. So thanks to all of those people I don't know personally, because you opened my eyes to a world I supposed to be as brittle as glass when in truth it is as resilient as water.

Although Naji (2016) is troubled by the 'extra-political conflict' in Egypt – the 'laws that obstruct freedom of opinion and expression, and impose stiff penalties on the press and artistic expression' – he remains true to his prior spirit of optimism (expressed in this article's opening quotation). The ethical positionings taken by real writers and real readers are not isolated or rational, but fundamentally situated and emotionally, culturally, and ethically loaded. It is precisely because reactions to literary texts are so intimate that mutual respect and compassion needs to be exhibited.

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