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The Question of Objectivity in Zola's Thérèse Raquin.

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in French at Massey University.

Kathryn Noreen Kearins,

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Abstract.

The first chapter examines the fascination the concept of objectivity held for certain French Realists including Emile Zola, acknowledged leader of the Naturalists who believed in the application of the scientific method to novel-writing. These writers sought to produce works of mimetic value and attached themselves to the tenets of objectivity in an attempt to achieve this. However it was recognized that their efforts at producing 'objective' novels were threatened by a requirement for artistry in published fiction. More recent thinking acknowledges that objectivity is not achievable, at least not in absolute terms. The problems inherent in various definitions of objectivity in fiction are examined and reveal general agreement that this kind of objectivity requires at least the appearance of detachment and neutrality by the author.

In order to examine the question of the author's detachment, Chapter 2 makes a case for the distinctions of author, implied author and narrator to be blurred in Zola's Thérèse Raquin. Four distinct aspects of the narrating voice are examined. Examples are given of the various forms of commentary in the narrative which reveal the presence of the author-narrator.

The author's preconceptions which threaten his neutrality are focused on in Chapter 3. The theory of determinism involving both causality and fatalism is seen as both abetting and threatening the author's attainment of a semblance of objectivity in the text. We examine the basis on which characters are presented and milieu is described in Thérèse Raquin. Zola is shown to be far from neutral.

In Chapter 4, themes dealing with aspects of class, employment, age and sexuality in Thérèse Raquin are explored and shown to enunciate the author's ideology and hence announce a further lack of neutrality. Reference to other novels by Zola which support the claims made is footnoted in an effort to establish an even closer and more consistent association between Zola and the implied author in his texts.

Zola's discourse on women in Thérèse Raquin is the focus in Chapter 5, where it is noted that the implied author of the text is not as feminist as Zola himself claimed to be. The ideology espoused in this novel equates with that in Zola's other novels and despite its appearance of feminism, merely reflects the bourgeois prejudices of his time. In this regard, the text's mimesis actually strengthens a case for its objectivity.

In Chapter 6, we conclude that Zola has not achieved the degree of objectivity in Thérèse Raquin which he claimed: he is neither detached nor neutral. However, objectivity is something which authors seeking mimesis should strive to attain. Zola is shown to act variously as a filter and as a block to the portrayal of 'outer reality' in his novel. His real achievement lies in his artistry and not in his attainment of objectivity. In terms of his theories, his achievements lie in the posing of questions, rather than in the provision of definitive answers.

Preface and Acknowledgements.

Among Zola critics, the divorce between Zola's theory and practice is a notorious commonplace. We might quickly dispense with his attempts at objectivity by saying his aims were misplaced - objectivity is impossible. Yet because he sought to achieve mimesis, his aims were perhaps not as misplaced as we might initially think. This perception calls for a re-evaluation of Zola's aims and achievements in Thérèse Raquin, which is often considered to be the prototype Naturalist novel.

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Chapter 1.

Objectivity in Fiction.

In 1856, John Ruskin, the literary commentator and art critic complained: "German dullness and English affectation have of late much multiplied among us the use of two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians - namely, 'objective' and 'subjective'."¹ Referring to this comment in A Glossary of Literary Terms, Abrams says that Ruskin was correct at least in part: "the words were imported into English criticism from the post-Kantian German critics of the later eighteenth century, and they have certainly been troublesome."² Various problems inherent in the concept of objectivity will come to the fore in our attempts to answer the following questions: Can objectivity apply to fiction? Can an author ever be completely objective? What might constitute an objective novel?

The first part of this chapter will consider the fascination objectivity had for certain nineteenth century French novelists, highlighting in particular Emile Zola's sometimes contrary opinions on the requirement for objectivity in his novels and the role of the novelist's "artistic temperament" in novel-writing. We will then move to look at objectivity in general and its application to fiction suggested by various definitions. We suggest ways in which relative subjectivity might be noted in a work of fiction. Finally a working definition is proposed which forms a basis for the examination of these ideas in relation to Zola's novel Thérèse Raquin in later chapters.

Before proceeding, we note the appeal of the quest for objectivity in fiction. In The Rhetoric of Fiction, Booth notes that

a surprising number of writers, even those who have thought of their writing as self-expression, have sought freedom from the tyranny of subjectivity, echoing Goethe's claim that 'Every healthy effort [...] is directed from the inward to the outward world'.³

Reacting to earlier romantic notions, various French thinkers in the second half of the nineteenth century began promulgating ideas about the desirability of objectivity in fiction. In A History of Modern Criticism 1750-1950, Wellek notes that the novelist Champfleury (1821-1889) was among the first in France who wanted to "chasse[r] l'auteur de son livre autant qu'il est possible."⁴ Of the numerous French writers who had a fascination for the concept of objectivity and aspired to produce works which were more objective than the romantic works of the past, we have elected to discuss three of the best known practitioners and theorists : Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880), Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) and Emile Zola (1840-1902).⁵ Each of these writers was familiar with the work of the other two and the influence of the work of Flaubert and Maupassant on Zola is highly probable.

Flaubert grew up during the French Romantic movement and completed the work for which he is best known, Madame Bovary, in 1856 at a time when Realism was the object of lively discussion in France. Realism implied a rejection of Romanticism and demanded careful attention to the details of everyday life and a sense of bringing literature to the people. Realism put before the public scenes which conventional taste saw as provocative and sordid and many authors, including Flaubert, were brought to trial on charges of 'offenses à la morale publique'. Whether because of the pejorative overtones the word 'Realist' assumed or because of a desire to keep experimenting with different forms, Flaubert never really identified himself as a member of a particular literary school. However it would be untrue to say that he was unaffected by the literary currents of his time. His novel, Madame Bovary, reflects these by moving away from an insistence on plot, events and portrayal of characters accompanied by specific comments by the author to a more detached presentation of the inner workings of people's minds.⁶ Flaubert strove for impersonality and for 'impassibilité' in his writing, although he was aware that even

without authors making direct commentaries, their personality would seep through.⁷ In a letter to Louise Colet he wrote, "L'auteur, dans son oeuvre, doit être comme Dieu dans l'univers, présent partout, et visible nulle part."⁸ Flaubert further enunciated this famous ideal in another of his letters:

Un romancier, selon moi, n'a pas le droit de donner son avis sur les choses de ce monde. Il doit, dans sa vocation, imiter Dieu dans la sienne, c'est-à-dire faire et se taire.⁹

Similarly, Maupassant believed that the only valid novelistic technique was that which attempted to reveal the workings of people's minds by their acts without recourse to direct analysis. In a study on Flaubert, his acknowledged master, he wrote:

Au lieu d'étaler la psychologie des personnages en des dissertations explicatives, il la faisait simplement apparaître par leurs actes. Les dedans étaient ainsi dévoilés par les dehors, sans aucune argumentation psychologique.¹⁰

Both Flaubert and Maupassant underscore the worthiness of the ideal of objectivity and suggest that it might be attained by a presentation which involves showing rather than telling.

Maupassant's Preface to his novel Pierre et Jean provides valuable insights into his views on objectivity. It is clear that Maupassant realized that mimesis in any strict sense was not possible. In any attempt to portray life, Maupassant acknowledged, something would be added to or taken away from it. He stated that novelists should seek the truth, but not "la photographie banale de la vie".¹¹ Realists, if they are artists, must aim at "la vision plus complète, plus saisissante, plus probante que la réalité même."¹² Maupassant makes the point that a novelist's work simply cannot parade before readers the multitude of insignificant incidents that clutter up everyday existence and hence cannot be truly real, nor indeed completely objective. He explains that the artist should select only those characteristic details that are useful to the

theme being explored; all incidentals must be rejected. In order to underscore his statement that art cannot be true to life, Maupassant gives the real-life example of the considerable number of persons who die accidentally each day. He asks whether one could, in the middle of a narrative, allow a tile to fall on the head of a central character or throw that character under the wheels of a carriage on the pretext that one must do justice to the part played by accident.¹³ He states: "Un choix s'impose donc, - ce qui est une première atteinte à la théorie de toute la vérité".¹⁴ Like other Realists, Maupassant is involved in a kind of balancing act: on the one hand, he is obviously interested in having his works published and his texts must therefore fit within certain constraints of length, level of detail and complexity; on the other hand, he wants his work to contain mimetic truth.

Maupassant concludes that Realists of merit should call themselves illusionists as what they actually do is "donner l'illusion du vrai, suivant la logique ordinaire des faits, et non [...] les transcrire servilement dans le pêle-mêle de leur succession".¹⁵ He distinguishes between the objective novel and the novel of pure analysis, the former being for him an ideal. Wellek notes that the objective novel is for Maupassant "a novel that avoids all complex explication, all discourse about motives and lets persons and events pass by our eyes".¹⁶ A means of so doing for Flaubert and for Maupassant was to search for 'le mot juste', a word which defines the particular object and no other object. Such a word supposedly denotes more than it connotes thus leaving it open to fewer subjective interpretations.

Maupassant's remarks about writers asserting their individual personalities, both in the choice of their subjects and their selective treatment, have to be understood in the context of a necessarily subjective vision. Wellek calls Maupassant

a relativist, or rather a subjectivist, in his theory of knowledge, if one can use such a

pretentious term for his feeling that 'Nos yeux, nos oreilles, notre goût différent créent autant de vérités qu'il y a d'hommes sur la terre [...] Les grands artistes sont ceux qui imposent leur illusion particulière.'¹⁷

Maupassant's particular version of Realism is based on observation, a sincere and artistic effort to present the results of his observations, and an awareness that the final result will not be an absolute truth, but a partial and relative one. He prefers to aspire to the objective mode while at the same time seeking to impart to readers the full force of his unique apprehension of experience. Clearly, Maupassant appreciated that mimesis required objectivity, but neither was truly attainable.

In acknowledging that the novelist is necessarily subjective, Maupassant was critical of the scientific pretensions of those writers claiming to record a verifiable reality: "Que! enfantillage, d'ailleurs, de croire à la réalité puisque nous portons chacun la nôtre dans notre pensée et dans nos organes."¹⁸

We note that the scope of perceptual judgements in any novel is bound by the perceptions of the author who ascribes them and are thus in agreement with Maupassant on this matter. Yet there were a number of writers who were attracted by the idea of portraying 'reality' objectively, one such writer being Zola. He was the acknowledged leader of the Naturalists¹⁹ who like the Realists generally believed in the mimetic function of art, but based their beliefs on the application of the scientific method to novel-writing.²⁰ Almost the entire body of Naturalist literary theory in France comes from Zola. Although he had much to say on the scientific method, over the years he often repeated and occasionally contradicted himself. We have therefore drawn out the main threads of his arguments as they relate to objectivity in fiction; in order to show the continuing nature of his dilemma, these will be considered in chronological order.

In 1864, in a letter to his friend Antony Valabrègue, Zola examined the notion that art cannot reproduce reality and that artists' observations are filtered through their character and perception. He states:

Toute oeuvre d'art est comme une fenêtre ouverte sur la création ; il y a dans l'enchâssé dans l'embrasure de la fenêtre, une sorte d'écran transparent, à travers lequel on aperçoit les objets plus ou moins déformés [...] On n'a plus la création exacte et réelle, mais la création modifiée par le milieu où passe son image.

Nous voyons la création dans une oeuvre, à travers un homme, à travers un tempérament, une personnalité.²¹

Zola goes on to state that different temperaments and personalities will see things in different ways, but never in a way which is completely faithful to reality. At this point, Zola appears to be in agreement with Maupassant's later statements.²² Zola concludes: "La réalité exacte est donc impossible dans une oeuvre d'art. On dit qu'on rabaisse ou qu'on idéalise un sujet. Au fond, même chose. Il y a une déformation de ce qui existe."²³

In a collection of critical essays entitled Mes Haines, published in 1866, he once again signals the importance of artists' temperaments in their efforts to represent reality in their work. "J'exprimerai toute ma pensée", Zola tells us, "en disant qu'une oeuvre d'art est un coin de la création vu à travers un tempérament."²⁴

Despite these earlier assertions that art is mediated by the personality of the artist, in 1868, when he published his famous preface to the second edition of his novel, Thérèse Raquin, Zola was claiming the detachment of a scientist from his work. Annoyed by charges that his novel was immoral, Zola defended it with the claim that it was a scientific study and that "le reproche d'immoralité en matière de science ne prouve absolument rien".(p. 61)²⁵ This was to become a

sort of Naturalist credo. Because Naturalists saw themselves as similar to scientists they believed that they were beyond the criteria of morality in matter and in manner : they were neutral analysts of observed facts. Zola wrote of his purpose in Thérèse Raquin: "Mon but a été un but scientifique avant tout" (p. 60). His ultimate goal, like that of the scientist, was "la recherche du vrai" (p. 60). Using what he calls "la méthode moderne"(p. 63), working "comme un médecin"(p. 61), "avec la seule curiosité du savant"(p. 61), Zola claims to have engaged in "l'analyse scientifique"(p. 62), "l'étude d'un cas curieux de psychologie"(p. 60) carried out on "[des] pièces d'anatomie nues et vivantes"(p. 63). For Zola, the scientific method implies objectivity. He writes, "je me suis perdu dans la copie exacte et minutieuse de la vie"(p. 60), pointing out that the experimental novelist should engage in a dispassionate "analyse du mécanisme humain"(p. 60). "L'humanité des modèles disparaissait"(pp. 61-62). He claims to study "des tempéraments et non des caractères"(p. 59). The protagonists in his novel are "des brutes humaines"(p. 60), "souverainement dominé[e]s par leurs nerfs et leur sang"(pp. 59-60), for whom "l'âme est parfaitement absente"(p. 60), and who suffer from a "simple désordre organique"(p. 60).

An examination of Zola's professed aim reveals several problems. First, despite claiming to be objective, in these explanatory remarks Zola already begins to apply judgements to his characters by labelling them 'brutes'.²⁶ Second, it is difficult to ascribe any definite meaning to some of his statements. We might question whether temperament and character can be separated and what the absence of a soul really implies. Third, as we shall see, there are insurmountable obstacles in even Zola's own practice of what he proclaimed. Fourth, through his retrospective presentation of his theories, Zola threatens the very objectivity of his text for he is clearly not detached from it.

Although we do not consider all of Zola's arguments in his preface to Thérèse Raquin to be valid, it is worth noting in this context his insistence on biological and social determinism in human events, to the extent that he perceives no real need for an author to intervene once the constructs of environment and heredity are introduced.

This is elaborated upon in his collection of critical essays entitled Le Roman expérimental, published in 1880. Zola writes:

le romancier est fait d'un observateur et d'un expérimentateur. L'observateur chez lui donne les faits tels qu'il les a observés, pose le point de départ, établit le terrain solide sur lequel vont marcher les personnages et se développer les phénomènes. Puis l'expérimentateur paraît et institue l'expérience, je veux dire fait mouvoir les personnages dans une histoire particulière, pour y montrer que la succession des faits y sera telle que l'exige le déterminisme des phénomènes mis à l'étude. [...] En somme toute l'opération consiste à prendre les faits dans la nature, puis à étudier le mécanisme des faits, en agissant sur eux par les modifications des circonstances et des milieux, sans jamais s'écarter des lois de la nature. Au bout, il y a de la connaissance de l'homme, la connaissance scientifique, dans son action individuelle et sociale.²⁷

We make the rather obvious point that in seeking to apply to novel-writing the methods of observation and experiment advocated by the physiologist Claude Bernard, Zola was drawing a false analogy between the functions of scientists and novelists.²⁸ Unlike his earlier comments wherein he acknowledged the role of writers' temperaments and personalities in the creation of the Naturalist novel, in 1880 Zola's fascination with the application of science temporarily blinds him to these subjective elements.

However Zola does return to this stance the following year in a collection of studies and reviews entitled Les Romanciers naturalistes. Prefacing his study on Flaubert, and claiming Flaubert's Madame Bovary as a prototype of the Naturalist novel, Zola writes:

Le romancier naturaliste affecte de disparaître complètement derrière l'action qu'il raconte. Il est le metteur en scène caché du drame. Jamais il ne se montre au bout

d'une phrase. On ne l'entend ni rire ni pleurer avec ses personnages, pas plus qu'il ne se permet de juger leurs actes. C'est même cet apparent désintéressement qui est le trait le plus distinctif.²⁹

Sounding very much like Flaubert himself, Zola suggests here that Naturalist novelists are present in their work, but should not be visible therein. Zola's statement above, interpreted literally, insists that Naturalist novelists never show themselves 'au bout d'une phrase', but what of their revealing their presence and their judgements by the use of emotive words or phrases within a sentence? Certainly, we would expect the more clumsy and obvious authorial interventions to be absent from their work,³⁰ and this is indeed generally the case. However a close and careful inspection may well reveal that the authors of Naturalist novels are probably more evident in their work in various other ways than they may have intended, despite what Zola goes on to say:

On chercherait en vain une conclusion, une moralité, une leçon quelconque tirée des faits. Il n'y a d'étalés, de mis en lumière, uniquement que les faits, louables ou condamnables.³¹

We presume that Zola is referring to the reader vainly seeking a conclusion or lesson, moral or otherwise. We believe that authors, and indeed Zola himself, provide some basis for the reader to draw such conclusions. Zola seems to indicate above that facts are of themselves either commendable or condemnable. We suggest that this is not so; whether a fact is, let us say, 'good' or 'bad', surely depends on how authors choose to describe that fact and any judgements on it which they imply. It also depends on how readers interpreted any evaluative signals in the text. In both cases the social attitudes of the time have some bearing on the interpretation given or derived. Zola differentiates between Naturalist writers and their readers as follows:

L'auteur n'est pas un moraliste mais un anatomiste qui se contente de dire ce qu'il trouve dans le cadavre humain. Les lecteurs concluront, s'ils le veulent, chercheront la vraie moralité, tâcheront de tirer une leçon du livre. Quant au romancier, il se tient à l'écart, surtout par un motif d'art, pour laisser à son oeuvre son unité impersonnelle, son

caractère de procès-verbal écrit à jamais sur le marbre. Il pense que sa propre émotion générerait celle de ses personnages, que son jugement atténuerait la hautaine leçon des faits. C'est là toute une poétique nouvelle dont l'application change la face du roman.³²

Readers, according to Zola, continue to read texts in conventional ways, whereas writers concerned with their art are able to stand back and be objective. If we were to accept Zola's notion of an objective writer, could we not accept that readers could also be objective? We contend that the reverse is in fact true: if reading is necessarily subjective, then so too must be writing, for both involve ascribing meaning through individual mindsets. Readers are a most obvious source of interpretive diversity, since each one brings to the narrative a different set of experiences and expectations.³³ What Zola implies, and what is difficult to accept, is that writers are capable of writing objectively and non-judgementally. Effectively, he attempts to pass the responsibility for making judgements to the reader.

And yet in the same year as Zola published Les Romanciers naturalistes wherein he made the above statements emphasizing the requirement for objectivity on the part of the author, he is reported as giving even greater significance to the creative act than to the recording of objective reality. Hewitt points this out in his work, Through those Living Pillars where he notes that in a collection of articles entitled Documents littéraires, Zola reaffirms that "La réalité seule ne me séduit pas."³⁴ He comments further:

Zola now clearly tolerates, even praises to some degree, provided they spring to life, those 'false' realities created by the more imaginative geniuses in writing and painting. His critical judgements here take into account 'ce que l'homme ajoute à la nature pour la créer à nouveau d'après les lois d'optique personnelles.'³⁵

Even at this later stage of his career, there seems to be a dichotomy in Zola's thinking on the issue of objectivity in fiction. On the one hand he underscores the value of portraying in his work scientific truth based on the laws of physiology and direct observation of phenomena. On

the other hand he is convinced that a purely scientific report of observed phenomena can never be art, that art owes its interest and value to the modifications of objective truth made by the artist's personality.

Despite its troublesomeness, the appeal of objectivity for Flaubert, Maupassant and Zola is apparent in their critical work which informs their respective fiction.

We turn now to discuss more recent ideas about objectivity. We preface our remarks on specific definitions by noting the one point on which unanimity has generally been reached in the intervening century. It is commonly held nowadays that there is no such thing as objectivity.³⁶ Philosopher Thomas Nagel's comments in his work, Mortal Questions, provide a background to our discussion and much of what he says can be applied to objectivity in fiction. Nagel acknowledges that when he speaks of the subjective viewpoint and the objective viewpoint, it is just shorthand, for there is no such thing as these two viewpoints, nor do they represent categories into which more particular viewpoints can be placed. Instead there is a kind of polarity: at one end of an imaginary continuum is the point of view of a particular individual with a specific constitution, situation and relation to the rest of the world. From there, the movement toward greater objectivity involves, according to Nagel,

first, abstraction from the individual's specific spatial, temporal, and personal position in the world, then from the features that distinguish him from other humans, then gradually from the forms of perception and action characteristic of humans, and away from the narrow range of a human 'scale' in space, time, and quantity, toward a conception of the world which as far as possible is not the view from anywhere within it. There is probably no end-point to this process, but its aim is to regard the world as centreless, with the viewer as just one of its contents.³⁷

Nagel states further that "objectivity requires a departure not only from one's individual viewpoint, but also, so far as possible, departure from a specifically human or even mammalian

viewpoint."³⁸ We note that in both instances mentioned above, Nagel qualifies the departure from the individual viewpoint with 'as far as possible' and 'so far as possible', implying the impossibility of one ever being able to completely abandon a subjective viewpoint.³⁹ Nagel makes the point that the distinction between subjective and objective is relative. He states that "a general human point of view is more objective than the view from where you happen to be, but perhaps less objective than the viewpoint of physical science."⁴⁰ However, even the view espoused by Zola and many others besides, that the physical sciences are objective is liable to attack because scientific theories are tested against observations. The recognition that observation is theory-dependent suggests that observation does not provide an independent basis for testing scientific theories.⁴¹

Doubtless it is in response to the pursuit of objectivity by various authors, particularly in the past, that a number of literary commentators have attempted to define what objectivity in fiction means and what constitutes an objective work. The definitions which we have selected and commented on below each illustrate various aspects of the troublesomeness of the concept of objectivity in literature.

We start with the most simplistic definition which implies that it is possible to produce works of fiction which can be deemed to be objective. In A Handbook to Literature, Holman and Harman define objectivity as "a quality in a literary work of impersonality, of freedom from the expression of personal sentiments, attitudes or emotions by the author".⁴² We have already acknowledged that total abstraction from one's individual viewpoint is impossible. In the case of fiction, authors inevitably invest something of themselves in their work. They may wish to appear wiser or more liberal than they actually are in real life and present an image of this in their texts, however this still amounts to integrating this desire, an aspect of their personality, in their texts.

Cuddon's definition in A Dictionary of Literary Terms is more moderate, but nonetheless problematic. He states:

Objectivity suggests that the writer is 'outside' of and detached from what he is writing about, has expelled himself from it, is writing about other people rather than about himself, and by so doing is [...] preserving what is described as 'aesthetic distance'.⁴³

Again there is a suggestion that writers can remove themselves from their work. Such detachment by authors who inevitably retain manipulative control over their work is questionable. Cuddon does however make the point that during the process of writing, any writer of any merit is simultaneously subjective and objective.⁴⁴ He explains that a writer "is subjectively engrossed in his work and the quality and intensity of his personal vision will be dictated in a subjective way. At the same time he must be removed from and in control of his material."⁴⁵ The point we would raise here, and upon which we will comment later in the chapter, is that although these commentators agree on the absence of authorial intervention as a requirement for objectivity, they do not state how writers can so remove themselves.

Other definitions of objectivity in fiction also suggest the requirement for writers to be detached from their work, yet they differ in at least one respect. The following definitions underscore what we shall call here 'the appearance of detachment'. Abrams defines an objective work as

one in which the author simply presents his invented situation or his fictional characters and their thoughts, feelings, and actions, himself seemingly remaining detached, and non-committal.⁴⁶

In respect of this definition we might first note that to say as Abrams does, that the author 'simply' presents invented situations or fictional characters is somewhat imprecise as a definition. It is doubtful whether most authors would agree that the act of presenting elements in

a piece of fiction while attempting to remain seemingly detached is a simple task. Alternatively, given the other sense of the word 'simply'- as in, "absolutely, without doubt or possibility of argument",⁴⁷ it is unlikely that authors could successfully present the elements of a fiction in such a way as to avoid leaving them open to a variety of differing interpretations. Abrams gives a specific definition of the objective novel as "one in which the author effaces himself and seemingly leaves the story to tell itself."⁴⁸ It is worth noting that both of Abrams' definitions incorporate the word 'seemingly' - in the former definition, the author 'seemingly' remains detached and, in the latter, the author 'seemingly' leaves the story to tell itself.⁴⁹ The inclusion of this word highlights the difficulty authors encounter in any efforts they might make to remain detached from their work and in allowing their stories to tell themselves. Interestingly, the qualifications apparent in these more recent definitions of objectivity in fiction (the emphasis on the words 'seemingly' and 'seems') are echoed in Zola's statements that the Naturalist novelist 'affecte de disparaître' and that the Naturalist novel is characterized by 'cet apparent désintéressement'.⁵⁰ Despite any efforts they may make in this direction, authors are generally present in their work and can be so in a variety of ways. As we will see, authors may use words or phrases, or express things themselves in their novels in such a way as to reveal their personal preferences and prejudices or moral stance. If, by definition, authors can therefore only 'seem' to achieve the criteria for objectivity, it is clearly doubtful that strict objectivity can apply to fiction.

If indeed all authors can aspire to is the appearance of objectivity, then are their works necessarily subjective? If we apply Nagel's concept of a continuum, we must accept that there are various degrees of subjectivity which might apply to particular works of fiction. One author might be more objective than another, or more subjective. Abram's definitions tend to reflect the poles at each end of the continuum rather than this kind of relativity, but it is still useful to

consider his definition of a subjective work in the light of it being a definition of a 'less objective' work. For Abrams, "a subjective work is one in which the author incorporates his own experiences or projects his personal disposition, judgements, values and feeling."⁵¹ It is doubtful whether the incorporation of authors' own experiences into their work would necessarily imply that their work was 'far' from objective - such experience could be imparted in outwardly objective terms by being attributed to a character perhaps, or even by using a pseudonym. On the other hand, any account of authors' own experiences which projects authors' specific viewpoints in such a way that those viewpoints could be attributed as being the authors' own, would be more subjective. Abrams' specific definition of a subjective novel is "one in which the author intervenes to comment and deliver judgements about the characters and actions he represents."⁵² We should note that an author's judgements in such a novel may be explicit or implicit - for example in the latter case they may involve the use of irony which transcends the actual words in the text but which still communicates a judgement. The use of implicit commentary allows an author to 'seem' to be objective.⁵³

The above examples suggest that authors might contrive the appearance of detachment should they seek to produce more objective works. In what has become a classic work in its field, The Rhetoric of Fiction,⁵⁴ Booth asks, "what is it, in fact, that we might expunge if we attempted to drive the author from the house of fiction?"⁵⁵ He notes that first all direct addresses to the reader, all commentary in the author's own name must be erased. Novels must be purged of

every recognizably personal touch, every distinctive literary allusion or colorful metaphor, every pattern of myth or symbol; they all implicitly evaluate. Any discerning reader can recognize that they are imposed by the author.⁵⁶

Booth suggests "we might even follow Jean-Paul Sartre and object, in the name of 'durational realism', to all evidences of the author's meddling with the natural sequence, proportion or

duration of events".⁵⁷ Even so, the task of effacing all such manifestations of the author's voice, Booth admits, is not really possible. The author's presence will be obvious on every occasion when point of view is shifted and indeed on all occasions where an 'inside view' is tendered, because, according to Booth, in life such views are not to be had. Even the convention of the narrator, he concludes, "is itself the author's presentation of a prolonged 'inside view' of a character".⁵⁸ The author is also present "in every speech given by any character who has had conferred upon him, in whatever manner, the badge of reliability".⁵⁹ Authors' very choice of what they tell betrays them to the reader. Booth concludes that "though the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear".⁶⁰ For Booth then, authors can never be completely detached although they may well strive to appear to be absent from their works.

Because, of all those critics cited, Booth deals most fully with the problem of objectivity, it is worth considering his definition at some length. For Booth, objectivity rests on "an attitude of neutrality toward all values, an attempt at a disinterested reporting of all things good and evil",⁶¹ which he concludes is unattainable in any complete sense. It also sometimes means, "an attitude of impartiality toward [...] characters",⁶² although he notes "in practice, no author ever manages to create a work which shows complete impartiality, whether impartial scorn, like Flaubert in Bouvard et Pécuchet attempting to 'attack everything', or impartial forgiveness".⁶³ Finally, Booth notes that an author's objectivity can mean what Flaubert called 'impassibilité', which is an unmoved or unimpassioned feeling toward the characters and events of one's story. Booth makes a distinction between each of these three qualities of an author's objectivity - neutrality, impartiality and 'impassibilité' - which appears to us a little awkward, as there is considerable overlap. The link which we make between objectivity and a required impersonality of technique is not shared by Booth. However, this link is made by Martin in his book entitled

Recent Theories of Narrative. He states:

objectivity can mean that the author should suppress not only his/her personality, but the narrating voice as well. Rather than being told what happened, the reader should be allowed to experience it directly, through dramatic presentation, (for example dialogue).⁶⁴

Martin notes that there are pitfalls to this idea of objectivity and he refers us back to Booth and some of the problems which we have listed above. We agree that neither objectivity nor its requisite detachment can be achieved in any absolute sense. However, we note that the clue to the author's presence is tied closely to the question of whether we can identify the author with the narrator/s of a given work, a problem which we shall address in relation to Zola's Thérèse Raquin in Chapter 2. At this point, we need note that writers' detachment from their work requires impersonality of technique.

Besides being detached, writers seeking to be objective need also to be neutral. This means setting aside any biases which predispose them towards particular conclusions. In this regard, we conclude this section relating to general definitions by alluding to Benet's definition of objectivism as it refers to literature. In The Reader's Encyclopedia, he describes objectivism as

a term used to describe a movement or theory of composition in which material objects are selected, and studied and presented for their own sakes rather than for any extraneous purposes, such as their suitability for symbolizing an emotion or intellectual concept of the author.⁶⁵

We doubt whether authors can ever be certain that their motivations for selecting, studying and presenting material objects are untainted by wider considerations. Benet's definition specifically mentions the selection, study and presentation of 'material objects' but no reference is made to characters or other elements of fiction. Some novelists have exploited this notion and attempted

to reduce characters and various physiological and psychological constructs in their work to the status of material objects, so claiming for their work a degree of objectivity.⁶⁶ Conversely, material objects may take on animate or even human qualities.⁶⁷ In using the techniques of reification and anthropomorphism, authors are not presenting the elements of fiction for their own sakes, but in such a way so as to correspond to a theory. Both exploitations rely on theoretical considerations which lie outside the constraints of Benet's definition. We would make the point that the very adherence to any theory necessarily implies that an author is lacking in neutrality and hence in objectivity.

From the preceding discussion it can be seen that absolute objectivity in fiction is neither attainable nor quantifiable; the objectivity principle is more a convention implying guidelines for authors wishing to aspire to it. These guidelines relate to detachment and neutrality: the achievement of impersonality in technique is fraught with problems, as is the condition that authors lay aside their theories. Objectivity is in itself a concept or a theory. Should authors let readers know that they aspire to objectivity and enunciate particular ways in which it might be achieved in their texts, paradoxically they threaten their efforts to achieve it.

Having discussed the appeal and dilemmas objectivity posed for certain authors and the strengths and weaknesses in definitions of objectivity as it applies to fiction, we now propose a slightly modified definition which along with Zola's own comments in his famous Preface to Thérèse Raquin, we shall later attempt to apply to that novel. The enhanced objectivity of a novel suggests in so far as is possible admitting the constraints of the craft and the desire for the novel to be artistic, an attitude of detachment and neutrality on the part of the author. A more objective work is one in which the author's personality and theoretical standpoint are relatively unobtrusive. In the text of a novel, this can be seen through the absence of both

explicit and implicit commentary and ideology which are able to be ascribed to the author.

These relatively straightforward statements belie the difficulties in seeking out just what constitutes an instance where an author is not being objective. In the chapters which follow, we address some of the above issues more closely when we proceed to examine such instances in a detailed textual analysis of Zola's Thérèse Raquin, often considered to be the prototype Naturalist novel.