Narrativeness

"The course of events? N.B. N.B. N.B.? The course of events."
-- the notebooks to The Idiot

1. Theses.

Here are some theses I would like to advocate:

1. There is such a thing as narrativeness, which narratives may have in varying degrees. Some have no narrativeness at all.

2. There are views of the world that require narrative and others whose whole impulse is to overcome it. In one case, only narrative can describe what is essential; in the other, it merely appears that way, but if one has the right theory and the requisite information, narrative can be dispensed with. It's proper role, at best, is to serve as a convenient illustration of what is really important. The need for narrative is a sign of temporary ignorance.

There are intermediate positions, but we may regard these as tending one way or the other.

3. Since the time of Descartes, the history of Western thought has been increasingly dominated by the second, anti-narrativist view. One has a science when one no longer has a story. To this tradition belong Leibniz, Marx, and Einstein; the dominant tradition of theology, of economics, and of anthropology; natural theology, social science when it is understood as a science, and most of city planning.. In the study of literature, Russian formalism and structuralism wherever practiced reflect the spirit of this tradition with special intensity.

4. But there has always been a counter-tradition that regards the attempt to overcome narrative as a fundamental misunderstanding of the way things are. We live in a world in which narrative is essential. To this tradition belong Darwin, Adam Smith, and Clausewitz; and these draw on earlier thinkers, from Aristotle and the casuists to Montaigne and numerous skeptics. The novel as a genre reflects, up to a point, a philosophical belief that the world requires narrative and is essentially casuistical in its impulse. In theology, narrative is, I think, essential to the Bible, even if the main efforts of most theological traditions, Jewish and Christian, have been to explain the narrativeness away as mere concessions to the ignorance of a primitive tribe or the common people.

5. I suspect we are at the beginning of a revival of narrativeness as a form of thought. It will revive when our take on the world changes.

6. In literature, narrativeness characterizes different narrative genres in different ways and in different degrees. It is most realized in what I call the literature of process. Bakhtin's "polyphonic novel" would be, in this view, a subset of the literature of process.

7. The dominant tradition of poetics has been, like Leibniz's philosophy, an attempt to think narrativeness away. But here, too, there are alternatives.

2. Essential Narrative.

Narrativeness may be defined as the quality that makes narrative not merely present but essential. It comes in degrees.

One can have narrative without narrativeness. For example, in most contemporary economic theory, timeless equations dictate a specific and optimal result. In a commonly used metaphor, it's like placing a ball at the lip of a cup and letting it fall to the bottom. We know where the ball will end up, and the specific path doesn't matter. Of course, one could tell the story of how the ball fell from here to there until it reached the lowest point, but such a story would be entirely superfluous. Such reasoning explains why the study of economic history, once essential to the education of economists, has now almost disappeared from the American Ph.D. curriculum. What we have instead are occasional examples from economic events that illustrate, but do not explain, some general principle.

3. Possible Futures.

When is narrative needed? When is it impossible? When gratuitous?

Narratologists have repeatedly pointed out that narrative is impossible when no meaningful connection links a sequence of events. Think of all those medieval chronicles recording random events thought noteworthy. 1023: Prince Vasily began to rule in Tver. 1024: A two-headed calf was born. Later in 1024: Saint Pstislav of Perm cured a beggar of leprosy. These entries do not constitute a story. They are at best material for one or many stories. We see what they lack when we try to make a story out of them by ascribing meaningful connections. Perhaps Prince Vasily rule badly, and so God warned the people with a two-headed calf, and then Saint Pstislav, to move the people to repentance, showed his holiness by curing a beggar…

Narratologists then proceed to offer a "minimal story," something like this: The queen grew ill, and so the king died of grief. "And so": there is a connection and so there is a story. The narratologists will go on to say that , of course, this isn't much of a story, but it is still a story. We have crossed a great divide from incidents into narrative.

True enough, but why isn't it much of a story? Answer: there is no process here. A process must have more than one step because it involves tracing possible futures, but here, as soon as we are given the opportunity to do so, the story is over.

The sense of process, the activity of tracing possible futures from a given past, is essential to narrativeness, though not, as this example shows, to narrative. "The queen grew ill, so the king died of grief" is a narrative without narrativeness.

4. The Romance of Mars.

Here is a situation in which one could construct a sort of narrative, but it would be pointless. Imagine describing the orbit of Mars around the sun as a story. That orbit could be wholly specified by astronomical equations, but one could also say that in March, Mars was here, and then in May it was there, and in June, while my Uncle Toby watched my father wind the clock for the month, we saw Mars at yet another place, and so on. Such a story would be pointless because it adds nothing (or nothing about the life of Mars). One already knows where Mars is at any moment without the story. Time is just t, a mere parameter of the equation, and no specific moment makes any difference.

We do not have to know where Mars was on October 10 to calculate where it will be on December 21.

What we learn from this example is that narrativeness requires presentness: the present moment must matter. It cannot be a mere derivative of early events or dictated by later events, that is, by the structure of the whole. It is not necessary that all moments have presentness, but some must, and it is from them that narrativeness derives.

5. Open Time.

And what gives a moment presentness? In a phrase, open time. For a present moment to matter, to have real weight, more than one thing must be possible at the next moment. We may define open time as the excess of possibilities over actualities. For a determinist, one and only one thing can happen at any given moment; what did not happen could not have happened. In open time, at least one thing that did not happen could have.

Think of the moment in War and Peace when Rostov, with "his keen sportsman's eye," realizes that if he and his men charge the French at this moment, they will rout them, but if he waits, the configuration of the French troops climbing the hill will change and the opportunity will be lost. Rostov may charge or not, and his choice matters.[1] Or consider Dmitri Karamazov holding a pestle over his father's head and trying to decide whether to kill him. He could do either, that's the whole point. The examples are endless.

6. Contingency.

For Aristotle, a contingent event is one that could either be or not be.[2] Contingency in this sense is what insures presentness, and therefore allows for narrativeness.

7. The Species of Contingency.

There are, so far as I know, three kinds of contingency. Since novels are about people, the one most often used is free will. Dmitri may either kill or not kill, and so he is morally responsible for what he chooses. Dostoevsky, whose project was to oppose determinism in the name of morality, provided especially intense descriptions of the agony of choice, of an intensified present in which something must be either done or not done.

But contingency may also lack a human agent, in two ways. Absolute chance, if it really exists, presents events that come from nowhere. Quantum physics appears to

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[1] Leo Tolstoy, War and Peace, trans. Ann Dunnigan (New York: Signet, 1968), 786. Further references are to W&P.

[2] Aristotle insists that contingency in this sense genuinely exists. "In those things which are not continuously actual there is a potentiality in either direction. Such things may either be or not be; events also therefore may either take place or not take place." He rejects the idea that "nothing is or takes place fortuitously, whether in the present or in the future, and there are no real alternatives; everything takes place of necessity and is fixed." Aristotle, "On Interpretation," The Basic Works of Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 46-47.

offer examples at the micro-level inasmuch as two identical systems can develop in different ways. Pure chance, however, provides weak material for narrative, precisely because it comes from nowhere and therefore seems to preclude the requirement that narratives offer meaningful connections. When it occurs in a novel or play, we usually attribute it to the overall design of the author. That is, if it is not occasioned by events in the narrated world, we take it as fulfilling some design of the whole. This is often what we mean by calling an incident a deus ex machina.

Sometimes the locus of open time may lie in events themselves, which in their complexity seem to have an impersonal agency of their own. We may call this subset of contingency "contingency in the narrow sense." Aristotle accepted this kind of contingency. Events themselves seem capable of working out in one way or the other, so that if a sequence were repeated, the outcome might be different. When critics of War and Peace objected that they could see why events could work out as they did but not why they had to, they were catching just what Tolstoy was up to. The idea that events are themselves contingent was Tolstoy's central idea. That is why a science of battle is impossible. Elie Halévy memorably called attempts from the eighteenth century on to construct a social science modeled on Newtonian astronomy "moral Newtonianism."[3] But if there is contingency in the narrow sense, then even without referring to free will, we may see why the idea of a social science is a chimera, as I think it is.

Contingency in the narrow sense differs from chance because the events do not come from nowhere. They do come from past events, as in determinism. But in contrast to determinism, earlier events, though limiting options, do not reduce them to singularity. Given what happened before, only these things, but not every thing, can happen. And yet more than one thing can happen. Thus Tolstoy frequently speaks of events taking place "for some reason" – not by pure chance, not for no reason at all, but also not for any reason we could anticipate by any laws or that necessarily yields a single outcome.

If there are contingent events in this sense, then predictability is out of the question. For if there is the slightest free play in the system – even if only between ten degrees of arc to ten degrees zero minutes and one tenth of a second – then the variation may concatenate from moment to moment until the possibilities are endless. Contingency ramifies. In chaos theory – and we may regard War and Peace as a sort of early treatise in chaos theory – that is why it is in principle impossible to predict the weather after about four days. Besides, even a single minute difference can make a radical difference in outcome. Think of the difference that a fraction of a centimeter can make in the target of a bullet, another metaphor Tolstoy uses.

The generals believe that they have a science that in principle can "foresee all contingencies," but, as Andrei explains to Pierre before Borodino, "what are we facing tomorrow? A hundred million diverse chances, which will be decided on the instant by whether we run or they run, whether this man of that man is killed" (W&P, 930). By "chances," Prince Andrei has in mind what I have called contingency in the narrow sense: we typically use the word chance when we want to stress either the element of unpredictability in a contingent event or a great degree of uncertainty. Andrei's idea is that no science that could ever be developed will tell us such things, which really matter in determining the outcome of a battle and most other things in life. Andrei asks: "What science can there be in a matter in which, as in every practical matter, nothing can be

[3] Elie Halévy, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism, trans. Mary Morris (Boston: Beacon, 1955).

determined and everything depends on innumerable circumstances, the significance of which becomes manifest at a particular moment and no one call tell what that moment will come?" (W&P, 775).

8. Casuistry and Alertness.

"On the instant, "at a particular moment": Andrei stresses the importance of presentness, and presentness depends on unpredictability and contingency. You have to pay attention to what is happening, what is taking place now, for now is not just yesterday plus one unit of time. After the fact, it will require narrative. We were in this situation, which meant these things could have happened, and this one did, so we did that, which put us in that situation, where those other things could have happened, but what actually happened was that, and so…

For Andrei and for Kutuzov, recognition of contingency leads to a whole different kind of behavior, which requires wisdom more than knowledge and presence more than planning. To attend wisely to what is happening, you need two things. First, you need to be alert, which is why Kutuzov at the council of war before Austerlitz, and Andrei at the end of his conversation with Pierre before Borodino both say that what is most essential before a battle is a good night's sleep. If you rely simply on some general principles of battle, or whatever is equivalent in other practical matters, you will miss opportunities and dangers. Aristotle, a physician and the son of a physician, insisted that a good doctor does not just apply biology. You have to be there now. Second, what you need is the sort of wisdom born of experience. You must have attended to many particular cases irreducible so some overarching law. In the root sense of the word, you must be a casuist. That is why Rostov knows when to charge: because of his "keen sportsman's eye," acquired during a great deal of hunting. Therefore you have to be alert for a second reason: not just to take in the shifting events, but also rapidly to see them in terms set by earlier experiences.

The sense that events have narrativeness places one in a wholly different world.

9. Wheels.

A parable.

Nature has designed many highly complex structures. Just think of the eye, the liver, the brain. But why has it never designed an animal with wheels? Every time we get into a car, or even push a wheelbarrow, we know the advantage of wheels over legs. And they are much simpler to design than livers. After all, we have built a lot of wheels that work but no liver that works.[4]

The answer is that the world is not paved. Wheels work on highways where the terrain is predictable. In a forest, or anywhere where the terrain is irregular, one may encounter an obstacle that wheels cannot negotiate, but which legs, which are more flexible than wheels, can. If the world were predictable, we would see a wheeled cheetah rolling after a wheeled antelope down the highway of the Serengeti. But animals have evolved to react to a world of radical contingency.

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[4] I owe this parable, which I have adapted, to the economist Aron Katsenelinboigen.

In our hands is an inbuilt tremor, which is why we need tripods; our eyes are perpetually scanning the periphery of our vision; our attention continually moves unless we focus it, which is hard. All these actions of scanning the world also bespeak our design for facing contingency. Perhaps consciousness itself is nature's most radical acknowledgment of the world's contingency.

10. Lack of Fit.

In mentioning evolution, I mean to invoke another thinker who, like Tolstoy, saw contingency as essential to the world and narrative as essential to its description: Darwin. When a social scientists refers to a process as Darwinian, he means something like the ball in a cup: everything tends inevitably to optimality, for anything less than optimal would be eliminated by competition. Such a view radically misunderstands Darwin.

Darwin explicitly and repeatedly denies that the world tends to optimality. There is no pre-given endpoint, like the bottom of the cup. It was natural theology that stressed the perfect design of organisms, which therefore testify to a divine creator working at a single moment of time. Precisely because Darwin insisted that the origin of species was historical, he described organisms as a hodgepodge of compromises layered on compromises, many of which come with other features that tagged along for the ride. That would have to be the case, because the environment in which each organism evolves, which crucially includes other organisms, is constantly shifting in unpredictable ways, and because one has to tinker with the tools at hand. It is the imperfect design of organisms, the features that no perfect creator designing at an instant would include, that testify to a historical process.

Darwin offers many examples, but my favorite, which he first noted in The Voyage of the Beagle and then explicated in The Origin of Species, concerns a certain species of mole, which has eyes but lives its entire life underground. Even if the mole were to surface, the eyes would be of no use because they are occluded with a thick membrane. Now, any organ requires energy to sustain, and so a useless organ hinders survival. The mole is not optimally designed, so why does it have those eyes? The answer is simply that it is descended from earlier moles for whom the eyes were of some use. The explanation is historical; it requires narrative. Darwin observes:

> He who believes that each being has been created as we now see it, must occasionally have felt surprised when he met an animal having habits and structures not at all in agreement. What could be plainer than that the webbed feet of geese are formed for swimming? Yet there are upland geese who never go near the water. . . . In such cases, and many others could be given, habits have changed without a corresponding change in structure.[5]

One needs story because the world is imperfect. One needs story because there is no goal. And one needs story because things do not fit.

11. Sufficient Reason.

[5] Charles Darwin, On the Origin of Species: A Facsimile of the First Edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1964), 185.

Darwin offers us the example of a non-Newtonian science, one that essentially requires narrative. In Darwin, the need for narrative derives from the essential messiness of the world, its lack of any pre-established harmony. By contrast, thinkers who seek to overcome narrative typically insist on the complete orderliness of the world. Though things may look messy, order lurks beneath, and the task of science or philosophy is to discover the order that will make the mess, and along with it the need for narrative, disappear. Things could not be different because then they would not all fit. There must be, as Leibniz put the point, a "sufficient reason" for everything.

I think that Leibniz stands at the opposite pole from Darwin and Tolstoy, and that the dream of a social science is essentially Leibnizian. The idea that we live in the best of all possible worlds, and that no other was genuinely possible given the perfect goodness of God, is an unusually pure version of the anti-narrative view. For Leibniz, there are no events that could have been other. In the famous thirteenth chapter of the Discourse on Metaphysics, Leibniz contends that everything in the "concept" of any given person was there from the beginning of the universe. Whatever Caesar may have felt, his crossing of the Rubicon was given in the nature of the universe, and was part and parcel of everything else, which has no loose play. The momentousness of the moment is entirely illusory, a product of our (and Caesar's) ignorance. The same with social science: alternatives are only apparent. To understand is to grasp why things had to be the way they are, because nothing is the least bit independent of other things, of the whole.

Events therefore lack what Bakhtin called eventness. In fact, Leibniz was far more extreme than Newton in this respect, and Halévy should probably have referred to moral Leibnizians. Unable to prove the stability of the solar system, Newton proposed that God occasionally intervenes to set things right. Leibniz was scandalized: was God an inferior watchmaker, he asked, who could not make things right to begin with? A perfect Being would design a perfectly harmonious world, in which there would be no need for interventions, for events. The laws determine everything, there is no deus ex machina.

12. Leibnizization.

Social scientists practice Leibnizism without God. Or to put it differently, they are natural theologians of a special sort. In natural theology, God created the laws and the laws run the world with perfect harmony. The social scientists precisely accept the existence of such divinely created laws, but without a God who created them. The view of the world is identical. It is entirely Leibnizian. Social scientists are, in effect, atheistic creationists.

Instead of God, they have given us God substitutes: principles that do what a perfect God would have done. And so natural selection, the invisible hand, and similar laws explain – it is always said "in principle," the world's best fudge factor – all events, which could not have been otherwise and which are mere instantiations of the laws. I want to say that social science's claim to have broken with the dominant theological tradition is groundless.

And so whenever a thinker, like Darwin, seems too important to ignore, he is Leibnizized. Economists have done the same with Adam Smith, who does not resemble the rational choice theorists invoking him. Anyone who has read The Wealth of Nations will recall that most of it is narrative history of the economy and the social conditions shaping it. Narrative is at its core, all the more so when we reflect that Smith's most common explanation for why things happened the way the did is not rational choice, not some law insuring optimality, but what Smith calls "human folly."

For Smith, the invisible hand, and for Darwin natural selection, are but one of several loose organizing principles operating in a world of contingency (in the broad sense). They operate in a world requiring narrative.

13. Suspense.

Here then are factors contributing to narrativeness: presentness, contingency, eventness, messiness, unpredictability, the need for alertness, possibilities in excess of actualities. What all of these provide is one more factor, a sign of narrativeness: suspense.

Children like to tell the following "story." Once there was an ant who moved a grain of sand. Then another ant moved another grain of sand. Then another ant, etc.

Imagine interrupting to ask excitedly: Wow! And what happened next? Well, then another ant moved another grain of sand, And then?

To use Bakhtin's term again, these are events that lack eventness. The reason there is no eventness is that there is no possibility of being surprised. "Surprisingness" can be present only when things are not just "given" (dan) but also "created" (sozdan). They can be created only when something is added to what came before. In the dead world of the determinist and the perfectly ordered world of the structuralist, everything is given, "ready-made" (uzhe gotov). Thus we have Bakhtin's acid summary of structuralism:

> An object is ready-made, the linguistic means for its description are ready-made, the artist himself is ready-made, and his world view is ready-made. And here with ready-made means, in light of ready-made world view, the ready-made poet reflects a ready-made object. But in fact the objected is created in the process of creativity, as are the poet himself, his world view, and his means of expression.[6]

The making of art is not making in the formalist or structuralist sense, fabrication by predictable rules. Creativity uses the ready-made as material and then, going surprisingly beyond, produces something unpredictably new. Otherwise, it is not really creative at all. It does so, crucially, because of a process with numerable unpredictable events, events with real eventness and presentness. There is a story to be told about it.

The creation of narrative art, like the narratives themselves, has real suspense.

No suspense, no narrative.

14. Eventness Is Not Narrativeness.

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[6] Mikhail Bakhtin, "The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis," Speech Genres and Other Late Essays, ed. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist, trans. Vern McGee (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986), 120.

Eventness pertains to specific events, narrativeness to the entire sequence.

Bakhtin interpreted the extreme moments of suspense in Dostoevsky as an attempt to maximalize eventness, but they meant that Dostoevsky does not achieve very well what the realist novel does. His novels do not show small moments of open time following each other and concatenating into a real process of continuous, gradual development, with each moment a causal nexus. Dostoevsky for Bakhtin is all "suddenly." I think Bakhtin exaggerates, but in the terms I am using he is saying that Dostoevsky displays maximal eventness but limited narrativeness.

15. Virtual History.

We can also see the difference between eventness and narrativeness if we consider the recent school of virtual history, as practiced by Niall Ferguson and others.[7] These historians deeply value narrativeness and appreciate the openness of time, and so what they strive to do is "what-if" history, a project that presents problems beyond the obvious lack of documentation.

One may easily imagine the first step. If Halifax rather than the new prime minister Churchill had won the debate in the cabinet in May 1940, England would have sued for peace and Hitler would have won. And then?

After the first step, the tendency is to imagine the future by drawing straight lines from the imagined situation. But if one is going to do that, one could just as well draw straight lines from the situation that did take place and show that what actually happened was entirely predictable, which no one could do. If they could, if the future were predictable from the present, what is the point of a what-if exercise in the first place? And can the historian do it from our own present?

The problem with what-if history is that there is only one moment of eventness, which is singularly odd, for there is nothing unique about the moment chosen. If contingencies ramify and if choices constantly present themselves, then there are no straight lines to draw. Of course, one might imagine, in great richness, the evolving fictive situation, and specify moments of choice, and then follow one of them, again and again, thus repeating the initial what-if. But then one would have something resembling a novel.

Perhaps a better alternative, one much more consonant with the thinking of Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, and Bakhtin would be to imagine the what-ifs – several of them, most likely – and then follow the choice that was actually made; and at the next moment of choice, do the same, repeatedly. In that case, one would have a sense of history as constantly presenting alternatives and the history we know as one possibility among legions.

16. An Occupational Hazard of Literary Critics.

Suppose that you have read a suspenseful story and then discovered the outcome was entirely predictable. Or imagine reading a detective story where you can easily guess the criminal. Or that you are re-reading a novel with foreshadowing and see all the signs and know where they are leading. In such a case, suspense is decidedly reduced,

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[7] Niall Ferguson, Virtual History: Alternatives and Counterfactuals (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

because the possibilities that might be projected are barely possibilities at all. They are the mere possibilities of possibilities.

Re-reading almost inevitably diminishes suspense. The more re-readings, and the better our memories, the more we focus, at each juncture, less on what might happen and more on how what did happen relates to the outcome and overall structure.

Literary critics are by necessity re-readers. Almost all their methods presuppose a firm grasp of the whole and all details. They are therefore naturally inclined to overlook possibilities of what might have happened. The occupational hazard of narrative critics is reading the narrativeness out of narrative. In structuralism, this tendency reaches its apogee.

17. Great Expectations.

When we understand a work as a whole, contemplate its design or structure, we see it as a pattern in which everything fits. It is, so to speak, visible at a glance. Process exists only within the narrated world, not in the artifact taken as a whole. A radical divide typically separates the characters from the author, critic, or re-reader. The characters experience open time and process, but the critic has overcome it. As in the social sciences, suspense and contingency merely reflect ignorance.

Imagine Pip having read the novel he is in; what would happen to his great expectations? Interestingly enough, the devil in The Brothers Karamazov does seem to have read Faust (and perhaps Paradise Lost).

First readers, and re-readers whose memory is imperfect, have a double experience. Insofar as they identify with the characters, they experience suspense, open time, narrativeness; but when they pause to contemplate the artifact, these experiences are overcome. Whenever a reader asks what an apparently contingent event (giving a pie to a convict) must lead to if the novel is successful; whenever he or she counts up all the unmarried males and females and anticipates how they will be paired off at the end; whenever, in short, the reader uses knowledge that the artifact is an artifact of a given sort, suspense and narrativeness are diminished.

Structuralism by its nature contemplates the whole. It therefore follows that structuralist readings of narratives, insofar as they do not go beyond the method, can only illuminate those elements that lack narrativeness, for much the same reason that social sciences deal poorly with spontaneous actions. By its very nature, structuralism denarratizes narrative. We need something entirely different to understand narrativeness. I believe the same observation holds, in varying degrees, for all current schools, especially those which, like new historicism and deconstruction, are formed from structuralist debris. They have not transcended its assumptions.

18. "The Real Present of the Creative Process"

The sort of work that maximizes narrativeness and eventness is what I call the literature of process. I have discussed this sort of work elsewhere, but its essential feature is that the author places himself within the narrated world, on a level with his characters, in the sense that there is no overall structure or end-point towards which the narrative aims. When Tolstoy began to publish War and Peace, he recognized that

having an overall plan or structure in mind would make it impossible to represent contingency, his central theme, because then the demands of a whole would guide events. They could not be contingent, and the work would become Leibnizian. And so, as he explains in his draft prefaces and his published essay on his book, Tolstoy did without a structure. In each serially published installment, he simply set up a series of potentials that could develop in many directions, and, writing from scene to scene, chose one of the rich possibilities available. He was entirely guided by the characters' present, not their pregiven future or some need to harmonize the whole. Tolstoy explained:

> In printing the beginning of my proposed work, I promise neither a continuation nor a conclusion for it. . . . this proposed work can least of all be called a novel – with a plot that has constantly growing complexity, and a happy or unhappy denouement, with which interest in the narration ceases. In order to explain to the reader what this present work is, I find it most convenient to describe how I began to write it.[8]

Narrativeness is eternally present in the world and so a truly realist work must never have a point at which narrativeness ceases: there can be no denouement, no closure. Tolstoy seems to be indicting the genre of the realist novel for being neither realistic nor novelistic enough, for yielding to the desire to overcome narrative, and for providing a teleological pull to events that takes the presentness out of them.

In stressing that his book is best explained by the process of writing it, he suggests that the creative process has the same presentness, contingency, and eventness as the events in the narrated world. Like the characters, he has no idea what will happen next to them. He will guide the character through different epochs, but "I do not foresee the outcome of these characters' relationships in even a single one of these epochs" (Jub 13:55). The result is that we sense that whatever happened, something else might have; and that the War and Peace we have is only one of many possible books that could have emerged. Narrativeness is intensified, or as Tolstoy put the point: "I strove so that each part of the work would have an independent interest, which would consist not in the development of events but in development [itself]" (Jub 13:55-56). Development itself: this is Tolstoy's term for narrativeness.

Bakhtin described the polyphonic novel, which I regard as one type of literature of process, as a work in which the author achieves eventness by surrendering the "essential surplus of meaning" provided by knowledge of the work's structure and placing himself on a level of ignorance with the characters.[9] Characters do not choose and act in execution of a plan of which they know nothing, like Milton's Satan, because the author knows what they will do only when they do it. The events take place "right now, in the real present of the creative process" (PDP. 63).

Bakhtin's model, as many have pointed out, does not apply very well to some Dostoevsky novels, like The Brothers Karamazov, but if we turn to others, like The Idiot, his essential point is true. The Idiot is a perfect example of process literature, and we do not need the notebooks and letters to sense that the author is literally ignorant of his

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[8] Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoi, Polnoe sobranie sochinenii [Complete Works in ninety volumes: the "Jubilee" edition], ed. V. G. Chertkov et al. (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literature, 1929-58), volume 13, p. 54. Further references are to Jub.

[9] Mikhail Bakhtin, Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 73. References are to PDP.

characters' future, which is why there are so many loose ends, promises that lead nowhere, signs of futures that never develop at all, as if the whole were a constant gamble, a series of bets that the author knows he will win only sometimes. As Dostoevsky wrote, "I took a chance, as at roulette: 'Maybe it will develop as I write it!'"[10] To emphasize the point, he had his characters read and be guided by stories in the press, some of which appeared after the initial installments of the novel, which meant that they could not have been part of any original plan. Having events in the real world that take place while the work is appearing in serialized sections is, in fact, a common technique in process literature, as we see from Tristram Shandy, Eugene Onegin, Anna Karenina, and, of course, Dostoevsky's Writer's Diary.

It was only when he was more than halfway through the work that he realized that the sheer processuality of life was its central theme. As Ippolit remarks in his famous confession, a document that he says was itself written processually: "Oh, you may be sure that Columbus was happy not when he had discovered America, but while he was discovering it. . . . It's life that matters, nothing but life – the process of discovering, the everlasting and perpetual process, not the discover itself, at all"[11] (Idiot, 375).

19. Process and Poetics.

And what have critics done with War and Peace, The Idiot, and other process works? Why – you guessed it – they have imposed a structured on them, read the narrativeness out of them, treated all events as if they could not be other. Mess turns into fit. The works have, like those of Darwin and Smith, been Leibnizized. Poetics, after all, gives us almost no other tools, and the Leibnizization of these works is itself testimony to the power of what I take to be an essentially mystical impulse: to overcome the world of events and escape into a purely Platonic realm of the eternal and stable.

I end with a plea: find the alternative. Reenter the world in which we actually live, the world of eventness, in which narrative is essential and in which some authors have produced works that take narrativeness to its extreme. We live in a world of everlasting and perpetual process, and to embrace process is to embrace life itself.

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[10] As cited in Joseph Frank, Dostoevsky: The Miraculous Years, 1865-1871 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 271.

[11] Fyodor Dostoevsky, The Idiot, trans. Constance Garnett (New York: Modern Library, 1962), 375.

To add.
Fatalism, Malinowski-foucault, Jakobson-tynyanov.
5.

This example is even more extreme than the economist's cup, because at least in that case, although the endpoint is predetermined, the ball is allowed many paths. The economist's cup is a species of fatalism, the orbit of Mars of determinism. In fatalism, the endpoint is given

Do Narrativeness.

Then poetics: novels with internal narrativeness and novels with narrativeness internally and externally.