

# *Path of Life*: Lev Tolstoy's Prescriptive Spiritual Diaries

Kristina Toland  
Bowdoin College

Gradually it has become clear to me what every great philosophy so far has been: namely, the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir; also that the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy constituted the real germ of life from which the whole plant has grown. (Nietzsche 13)

The Life, which I here *un-live*, has been an Amusement to me for forty years... If any have been so unfortunate as to Copy after my real, I here take the Opportunity to tell 'em, that I solemnly disown the Original. However, in the room of it, I here substitute a *new method of living* for them, and if they will embark upon the same bottom with me, our way, and our end, will be both the same. (Dunton xi)

Tolstoy's long-standing commitment to self-improvement—his constant, often public self-censuring and his experimentation with genre conventions—is amply documented in his last project, posthumously published as a book titled *Path of Life* (1910). If one believes Nietzsche's claim that every great philosophy is “the personal confession of its author and a kind of involuntary and unconscious memoir,” Tolstoy's last project represents a type of autobiographical writing. In the *Path*, Tolstoy combines his inseparable needs to

confess and to educate with a desire to write himself into a new life—wishes typically answered in a spiritual autobiography. By the 1900s, Tolstoy's life, oeuvre, and reputation had solidified into an image of Count Lev Tolstoy—an essentially limiting and limited public identity (notwithstanding a variety of portrayals that reflect diverging, or even polar opposite, popular opinions). A world-recognized celebrity, Tolstoy no longer needed to inform the public about his life; instead, in the *Path*, he used a moralizing, aphoristic format to share wisdom derived from his self-examination.

While the *Path* strikes the casual reader as being scarcely authored by Tolstoy himself, containing instead the words of some one hundred fifty-five listed authors, what draws the attention of Tolstoy scholars is the degree of his personal presence in the generalizing statements collected in this religio-philosophical treatise. Indeed, the correspondences between Tolstoy's life, especially as revealed in his diaries (the earlier ones and particularly those contemporaneous with the *Path*'s creation), and the *Path*'s content are telling. Viewed as a kind of encrypted text, this anthology of world wisdom reveals characteristics of an autobiographical, confessional life-account, and also serves as a biography of Tolstoy's

philosophical and religious views. Following his pseudo-autobiographical, auto-psychological, confessional, and memoirist experiments, the *Path* represents Tolstoy's attempt at a radically impersonal form of autobiographical writing.

In this strongly dogmatic, a-chronological text compiled from others' words, the life accounting is subordinated to a new aim of formulating principles of an ideal life. Continuing his practice of self-critique, he moves beyond the "idle reflections" of the rational mind into an active pedagogical practice in which the self-creating author acts upon himself while also instructing others how to live. Here, he combines his signature philosophizing with a new mode of writing the self.

This function of setting universal life-rules is consistent with the objectives of confessional literature as conceptualized by Michel Foucault, most notably in *The History of Sexuality*, which deals with the "modern man as a confessing animal." The confessional authoritative structure (Foucault's term) is evident in both the *Path*'s formal qualities (in the metonymic substitution of specific for general), and in the text's content and intended function as a rulebook. Tolstoy's reputation as the Yasnaya Polyana Sage is partly a product of his education ambitions, which found their fullest expression in this work. This new autobiography is the everyman's autobiography—an abstracted, exemplary philosophy of life that, for the lack of a better word, might be labeled with such graceless neologisms as *autobiosophy* or *philography* to harness the seemingly discordant aims of such a project. Its heterogeneity notwithstanding, the *Path* remains essentially autobiographical and should be considered as such.

One of the significant reasons for Tolstoy's move away from personal introspection toward anonymity, and for his universal-rule-making aspirations, was his public celebrity status and his struggle with vanity. Yet, no matter how much Tolstoy abstracted and generalized his personal identity on the formal level, the *Path*'s content, as

well as the cultural and ideological capital of Tolstoy's celebrity, points back to the author: a particular person whose sins and follies can be excavated from beneath the *Path*'s severe formulas.

Life-long self-documenting undertakings such as Tolstoy's or Rousseau's (the young Tolstoy's idol) combine solipsistic sensibilities with the ambition to communicate larger philosophical truths about humanity gained from personal experiences. Moving away from analyzing his actual life to showing a way to live life rightly, the author turns to the reader. From the moment of entry into the public sphere—namely, publishing autobiographic writings, circulating personal information such as diaries, personal correspondence, and achieving public recognition and celebrity status—the autobiographer no longer writes "for himself alone." Subsequently, popular culture, which encompasses types of publications ranging from newspapers and lowbrow press to thick journals, "salon" culture, and the art world, becomes the forum in which interactions between the author and his audience take place. The autobiographer reacts not only to his literary predecessors and generic conventions but also to his own celebrity images, as generated in mass media, often vis-à-vis non-literary means of representation. For Tolstoy, the popular technologies of photography and cinema, along with more traditional visual arts, became, in a matter of speaking, a mirror providing autonomous—i.e., independent from Tolstoy's authorial control—alternative reflections, showing him as a living individual and not as one of his auto-psychological literary characters or a protagonist in his memoirs and confessions. Modern recording technology became the medium to which he could trust something that is most "genuine, close to the heart" (*Tolstoy's Diaries* 420). As the nation's moral teacher, ultimately, Tolstoy wanted to use his life and persona as an example and teaching aid. Marked by dogmatism and a strong prescriptive quality, his autobiographical,

semi- and pseudo-autobiographical works, and even such intimate forms of self-documentation as ‘secret’ diaries, were all intended for public review. His final project is a fitting conclusion to his public education outreach efforts.

### **The *Path*’s Genesis**

Besides writing criticism, journalism and other polemical texts, religio-philosophical treatises, and strongly moralizing fiction, in the last decades of his life Tolstoy wrote a number of adult textbooks he called “life-teachings.” These booklets comprise a multi-volume corpus of texts and serve as the Tolstoyan, modern, secular alternative to analogous ecclesiastical writings, such as the composite *Great Menaion Reader* (ЧЕТЫ-МИНЕИ). (The compilations of daily calendar readings likewise offer extremely diverse models of exemplary lives as a guide to proper living.) Alternatively, Tolstoy’s “books of rules” can be seen as an updated version of the sixteenth century *Domostroi*—a codex of moral rules consisting of statements by various authors from the spiritual fathers popular in Russia like Zlatoust, to adaptations from various Russian, Greek, French, and Czech moral texts, quotations from the *Book of Proverbs* and other biblical texts, to aphorisms and proverbs.

Like such religious life-manuals, Tolstoy’s educational almanacs were structured either as daily or weekly reading dealing with specific subjects, such as Faith, Love, Sexual Lust, Violence, Death, Goodness, Education, Society, Family, and so on. Typically, each thematic or monthly compilation was published as a separate booklet; part of a series circulated in small inexpensive editions available to the mass consumer. Considering the potential impact of his almanacs as “exceptionally, terrifyingly strong,” Tolstoy spent the last seven years of his life continuously reworking and perfecting the content that made up his final almanac—his “magnum opus”—the *Path* (SS 22: 290).

This work was published first as thirty separate booklets and then posthumously as one book. It was based on materials taken from earlier variously grouped and titled collections of *Books for Daily Readings*, namely: *Thoughts of Wise People for Every Day* (Мысли мудрых людей на каждый день, 1903), *The Circle of Reading* (Круг чтения, 1906–7), *The New Circle of Reading or Readings For Everyday* (1909–10), and other *Circles of Life*. In the *Path*, Tolstoy collected “the most important thoughts,” organizing them according to a new thematic hierarchic order; fewer in number, they represent the best of his spiritual-philosophical realizations. It is worth noting that in the final version of this humanist anthology of great thought, Tolstoy’s editorial interventions and his own contributions are more pronounced. Unlike his earlier almanacs, wherein Tolstoy signaled his authorial presence by signing texts with his name, he exercises a slightly different authorial function in the *Path*. For example, while the reading selection “Why Do Men Stupefy Themselves?” was specifically identified as a text by Lev Tolstoy in the *Circle of Reading*, in the *Path*, there is no specific statement identifying the author as Lev Tolstoy; the unsigned aphorisms could be either his or someone else’s. He also creatively collaborates with world-renowned thinkers ranging from Confucius, Buddha, and Christ, to Tolstoy’s contemporaries.

In the 1903 preface to the *Path*, published as separate booklets, Tolstoy explains his involvement as necessary. Repeatedly, Tolstoy justifies his interventions, which include but are not limited to translating, condensing, omitting, paraphrasing, replacing words and whole sentences and other changes as a way to strengthen the message. He admits that some may consider such intervention not only unusual but even criminal, especially when dealing with classical texts.

Producing such “teaching aids” for a general readership, Tolstoy himself used the almanacs as an important part of his daily reading routine. In teaching others, he worked on himself, following

the rulebooks whose content he continuously refined. As confirmed in numerous popular records, during his last hours Tolstoy consulted his personal copy of *Circle of Life*, reading from the seventh of November selection. Eyewitnesses' accounts confirm that on that day Tolstoy read a specific entry containing a befittingly symbolic moral: "We can only guess what will be after death [...] but in dying we leave time" (Чертков 23–24; see also Paperno 265).

Tolstoy's intense involvement with the almanacs and his personal use of the booklets begs several questions: What role do such universalizing accountings of man's weaknesses and strengths play in Tolstoy's personal chronology, and how do they fit within his largely self-centered, autobiographical oeuvre? Can the *Path* (and this type of writing) be conceptualized as an autobiographical statement?

As compared to his autobiographically accented oeuvre, the *Path* represents the furthest extent of generalization wherein almost all of Tolstoy's personal life-related specificity is extracted and distilled into short universalizing maxims. Made up of aphoristic statements (predominantly not Tolstoy's own), this text seems to have little to do with Tolstoy's signature psychological self-explorations, which he began in *Childhood* and continued in such fictionalized confessions as *Memoirs of a Madman* and in the more explicitly confessional public declarations of *A Confession*. Of course, such a preference for the dogmatic and avoidance of the fictional were not uncharacteristic for the late Tolstoy. In evaluating his literary output in the *Memoirs*, Tolstoy diminished his celebrated literary accomplishments, validating only useful "truthful" accounts of his actual life, and famously called *War and Peace* "unimportant trifles." Such was his commitment to the idea of writing a meaningful and educational text that, already in 1895, Tolstoy began to evaluate his literary output based on how it could serve people:

In 1895, I wrote something of a will, that is, I expressed my wishes to those close to me regarding what will be left after me. [...] Frankly speaking, I do not assign much significance to all of these papers, except the last years' diaries. [...] The diaries, however, if I will not have enough time to express more clearly and succinctly all that I am recording in them, might be of some value, even if only in the form of the fragmented thoughts that are expounded therein. And therefore, their publication, if one were to omit all that is incidental, unclear, and unnecessary in them, may be useful to people. (SS 22: 571–2)

I would argue that the almanacs eventually took up precisely the role of explicating "more clearly and succinctly" the ideas he continuously addressed. By writing the almanacs, Tolstoy felt he was following his call of duty for mankind. Having asked himself whether there was "something self-serving, motivated by personal reasons" in writing them, he concluded that his silence would be a bad deed "in the same way it would be bad not to try stopping children who are sledding fast on the downward slope towards a gorge or under a train" (SS 22: 263).

The *Path*, in its emphatic prescriptivism, continues Tolstoy's life-long practice of composing diaries, moralizing fiction, confessions, and memoirs that are consistently characterized by severe self-censure and self-regulation. Used as such, this last work continues Tolstoy's enduring search for useful truths as derived from life experiences and spiritual peripeteias unique to him. In accordance with Tolstoy's late views, this exploration appeared in a new abstracted form, free of all incidental, ambiguous, and superfluous literary language and of fictional prevarication—the qualities already characteristic of his diaries.

### From Private Rule-Setting Books to Guidebooks for All

Throughout his writing career, Tolstoy engaged in compulsive diary keeping, painstakingly documenting his daily life in a variety of notebooks, which he kept at hand for writing down his immediate thoughts. Later in life, Tolstoy supplemented his regular diaries (which were accessible to the members of his household and read to his friends) with “secret diaries” characterized by varying degrees of confidentiality. Tolstoy’s diaries were as much about recording and analyzing his life as they were about setting rules and prescribing actions, planning his life, not just for a period of days, but also for a lifetime. Going beyond self-reflection, Tolstoy made his diaries into a guidebook as well as a “correction mechanism” by using his self-reported weaknesses in building further plans. The daily record keeping was inseparable from forming rules of how to act and even think. “I never kept a diary because I never saw any use in it,” he wrote in 1847.

Now, when I am occupied with developing my abilities, I can use the diary to gauge my progress. The diary must contain a table of rules, and the diary must also determine my future deeds. (SS 22: 12)

Following this year, Tolstoy’s diaries abound with references to this system of rules, and with Tolstoy’s notes about success or failure to follow his own rules and instructions. With predictable youthful ambition, on June 14, 1850, Tolstoy admits to the convenience of judging oneself based on one’s diary. “I’d like to get used to determining my way of life in advance, not just for a day a year, for several years, but for my entire life [...]” (*Tolstoy’s Diaries* 12). In 1908, some fifty-eight years after the entry quoted above, he expressed the same desire for self-betterment as when he was a youth, writing that he “must work on [himself]—do now, at eighty, what [he] used to with particular

energy when [he] was fourteen or fifteen; strive to improve [himself]” (*Tolstoy’s Diaries* 420).

Based on his daily self-observations, Tolstoy derived principles that often became essential for his life-philosophy and his school of thought. Judging his actions and thoughts in terms of whether they contained some universally useful lessons, he wrote about his mundane life as if under constant public scrutiny, especially in his later life. Consequently, he analyzed his own behavior from the perspective of a potential onlooker. Even a commonplace occupation like card playing contained a lesson. A diary entry from November 15, 1908 reveals Tolstoy’s logic:

Played cards yesterday until 12 o’clock. Ashamed, disgusted, I thought: people will say: ‘A fine teacher he is, he plays *vint* for three hours on end.’ Then I thought in earnest: That’s exactly what is needed. Therein lies genuine humility necessary for the good life. Or else, [it could be said that] a general ought to always behave like a general, an envoy like an envoy, and a teacher like a teacher. Not true. A man must behave like a man. First and foremost, acceptance is natural for a man, as is his wish to be humbled. This does not mean that it’s necessary to play cards if you are able to do something else, useful for mankind, but it does mean that it is unnecessary to be afraid of people’s judgments, and, on the contrary, to be able to tolerate them—*sans sourciller* [without turning a hair]. (*Tolstoy’s Diaries* 419–420)

The apparent premise of this moral mini-demonstration is Tolstoy’s disgust with himself after he indulges in a favorite leisure activity—an activity also admonished by the Russian Orthodox Church. Initially, he is ashamed; next, he imagines what others would say about him, for he is the “teacher.” However, as the argument unfolds, Tolstoy’s card playing becomes a manifestation of his desire to be humbled (to be “caught in the act”), which is then seen as a manifestation of his own

humanity. Finally, this incident becomes a test of his ability to withstand men's judgment with humility. That said, this argument remains somewhat unresolved in its justifications. In the section of the *Path* entitled "Temptations and Superstitions," Tolstoy points out that while "to sin is human, to justify sins is the devil's doing" (*Путь жизни* 74).

Purposefully written for the improvement of others, in its capacity to instruct, the *Path* was not different from Tolstoy's most secret diaries. In fact, the regulatory dogmatic element of his diaries became the overall controlling tone of Tolstoy's autobiographical discourse and in his writing in general; it was the dominant form of self-reflection in his late life-guide books. Expressly non-autopsychological, unlike so much of Tolstoy's work, the *Path*, notwithstanding, is created around an autobiographical nucleus documenting Tolstoy's private daily thoughts and experiences, or what Paperno calls "pre-printed diary." As the title promises, the book presents a life path. Yet, instead of tracing a chronologically unfolding life story day by day, Tolstoy offers a thematically structured roadmap of his spiritual growth, a set of rules regarding all aspects of human life, from considerations of faith to ordinary issues such as laziness, drinking, and superstition. Tolstoy's educational almanacs take the form of an anthology of collected "truths" that can guide man on his path to God, as they did Tolstoy. Tolstoy writes these books for himself and about himself and hopes that, in reading them, his audience will be "infected" (the word he used to describe the effect of a "true work of art" in his treatise *What is Art?* [1899]) by feelings similar to those he felt during his daily re-reading. He wants "the readers to experience in their daily reading of this book the same healing, uplifting feelings that [he] experienced while composing and which [he] continues to experience now as [he] re-reads the text daily" (PSS 41: 9). He writes both to infect the

reader and to elevate his own spirit, bringing himself closer to God.

The question to consider is, why does Tolstoy choose to mediate the stages of his individual progression (the stations on his path to God) by reducing his individual presence to a minimum, if not zero, almost completely suppressing the personal under the universal?

#### **"We, with Solomon and Schopenhauer"**

The path from telling a personal life-narrative to meditating on abstract ideas had already been traveled by Tolstoy's famous predecessor Rousseau in his autobiographical *Dialogues* and *Reveries* (both published in 1782). As in the case of Rousseau's *Reveries*, which focus on ideas of Nature, Charity, Goodness, and Love, rather than on a chronologically consistent personal life-account, *Path* is structured thematically. The missing explicit biographic narratives can be explained by reference to Tolstoy's celebrity. Both Rousseau and Tolstoy's accounts presuppose the reader's familiarity with the author's life story. In his autobiographical writings, even in the *Dialogues*, Rousseau relied on his celebrity and notoriety to provide details of his life and make his general points. Likewise, the Sage of Yasnaya Polyana does not explicate and contextualize his role as a narrator (it is not his memoir, confession, or pseudo-autobiography), for he is a luminary whose life story and political and philosophical credo are presumably sufficiently known to a broad readership.

In the *Path*, as in the earlier almanacs, the specific individual perspective of the individual subjective experience is practically expunged. While quoting from a range of world-renowned authors (including Rousseau), Tolstoy no longer dwells on his private history, his own "erroneous," even immoral and criminal life, as provided in his *Childhood*, *Confession*, or *Memoirs*. Instead of relying on the authentication of life that lends the "ring of truth" to his fiction, he uses genre

conventions associated with “truth”—maxims, aphorisms, parables, idioms, proverbs, fragments from wisdom literature, and excerpts from international religious canons. Now, “the uneasy equipoise” between personal (particular and autobiographical) and universal (applicable to everyman) is tipped almost completely towards general “truths” (Wachtel).

Compiling his almanacs from varied sources, Tolstoy acts as the mastermind responsible for conducting the *Path*'s argument. Already known for his tendency to make unconditional absolute statements (even in his fiction), Tolstoy reaches a new high, now writing not as an anonymous “Everyman,” but as one among numerous other Wise Men. Besides identified quotes, the book often contains statements that are not linked to any particular author but still use the first person singular pattern—a generic nonspecific “I.” (And, it is not always clear when Tolstoy speaks as his own “I” or when he adapts others’ sayings—as in “If I believe in God, I do not need to ask what will be the result of my submission to God, because I know that God is love, and nothing but good can come from love” (*Путь жизни* 10). One can compare this to Socrates’ voice in the *Path*: “[...] But I think that the highest bliss is in not wanting anything [...]” (92).

Alternately, while dealing with current issues such as the political situation, the role of socialism, modern science, sociology, and education, Tolstoy conceals his personal thoughts and opinions under an unspecific, generalized “we” for mankind as a whole. When he criticizes socialist ideology, which, according to him, mistakenly prioritizes bodily needs, he points out that it is in “our” time that we are vulnerable to this false ideology (*Path of Life* 58). As he puts it, “our” entire generation mistakenly and without question leads a lifestyle that contradicts the true moral life. An entry from a section titled “Pseudo-Science” reads:

We have constructed a way of life that is contrary to man’s moral and physical natures, and we are convinced that this is real life only because everyone thinks so. [...] Yet, we refuse to put all of this to the test of reason, because we think that humanity has always recognized the necessity for government, religion, and sciences and cannot live without them. (*Path of Life* 182–83)

Yet, among these universalizing moralizing statements, the *Path*'s themes of adultery, as in the section “Sexual Lust” or of drinking, as in “The Sin of Intoxication with Wine, Tobacco, Opium, etc.,” reveal distinctly Tolstoyan dilemmas and moral and physical challenges.

### **Lev Tolstoy’s Retrospective Spirituality**

In fact, the almanacs closely mirror Tolstoy’s well-documented private daily quandaries. Along with tracking his moods, physical states, thoughts, daily encounters and other diary-appropriate content, Tolstoy’s diaries contain the raw material that was processed into the content of his booklets. They provide additional clues as to what preoccupied him at the time of writing particular sections and show how the almanacs’ rules were internalized. The almanac entries are as much a product of Tolstoy’s reflections as a stimulus for further self-reflections that in turn generate a new round of self-critical introspection and penitent acts. For instance, the diary entries contemporaneous with Tolstoy’s work on the almanacs state his disgust with lust in the more concrete and specific terms of his personal encounters. In his “secret” 1908 diary Tolstoy writes:

They are all writing my biography—and it’s the same with all biographies—there won’t be anything about my attitude to the seventh commandment. There won’t be any of that terrible filth of masturbation and worse, from thirteen or fourteen to fifteen or sixteen (I do not remember when my debauchery in brothels

began). And it will be the same up to the time of my liaison with the peasant Aksinya—she's still alive. Then my marriage, in which again, although I have never once been unfaithful to my wife, I experienced a loathsome, criminal desire for her. Nothing of this appears or will appear in the biographies. And this is very important—as important as the vice of which I at least am most conscious, and which more than any other is forcing me to come to my senses. (*Tolstoy's Diaries* 423)

In the almanacs and later in the *Path*, lust, sexuality, physical relations between men and women, and childbirth are discussed under more conceptual summary headings.

Tellingly, Tolstoy's diaries also reveal the extent of his watchfulness concerning manifestations of his vanity; the *Path* correspondingly makes the issue of vanity into one of the main themes. In his late diaries, Tolstoy continuously chastises himself for his eagerness to see his name in the papers. For instance, in his diary from January 18, 1909 he writes the following: "Read a response to the Almanac and became aware of all of my depravity: how I am consumed by people's opinions. Glory to God, thanks be to Him—regained my senses. By the way, the current *Circle of Reading* is about just this" (SS 22: 290). The entries in an ensuing booklet deliver an abstracted instruction on how to avoid vanity.

This close proximity between the content of the almanacs and Tolstoy's private self-documentation allows scholars to read the *Path* autobiographically. There are instances where informed readers are able to discern and separate Tolstoy's distinct personal voice from among the *Path's* sayings based on their knowledge of his well-documented life and their familiarity with his writings. When analyzing Tolstoy's critique of vanity under the heading "Battle against Vanity," Michael Denner treats this particular entry as a glimpse into the writer's private realm of dreams, which Tolstoy

disguised under the suitably general parable-like form. This is not unusual for Tolstoy. Already in *A Confession* Tolstoy had combined autobiographical narration with summary moralistic statements in the form of dreams and parables, abridging his life particulars into the form of wisdom literature. Tolstoy's practice of putting "great" thoughts into his own work is traceable to his earliest diaries. The use of parables as abstract statements following longer autobiographical chapters served an important function in *A Confession* (Matual).

As if it were a part of overcoming writers' vanity, Tolstoy permits other thinkers to speak for him, admitting that the best words collected in the almanacs belong to others. Yet, he also feels that he was prescribed the task of being a "great" writer, a destiny to which he is obliged to submit.

I also wanted to write down that I'm compelled to believe, whether I like it or not, that people have accorded me a somewhat undeserved reputation as an important, a "great" writer and man. And this position of mine has its obligations. I feel that I've been given a bullhorn which could have been in the hands of others more worthy to make use of it, but *volens nolens* I have it, and I'll be to blame if I don't make good use of it. (*Tolstoy's Diaries* 427)

This curious self-abnegation (not without a hint of self-aggrandizement) can be seen as a likely attempt to counteract the possibility of being interpreted as a vainglorious person. And, it remains unclear whether Tolstoy sees himself as a humble anonymous gatherer of the Word or a universally famous "Great Sage" belonging to the same distinguished company as Buddha, Schopenhauer, or Rousseau.

Besides serving as a peculiar form of spiritual self-correcting diaries, the almanacs figure as an alternative index of Tolstoy's daily flow of thought. The genesis of this new writing form is telling. Tolstoy conceived the idea of the almanacs in 1903,

when, gravely ill and confined to bed, he “tore the pages off a wall calendar which hung above his bed and read the sayings of various thinkers printed on them” (*Мысли мудрых людей*). These sayings inspired Tolstoy and became the core of the first rulebooks. In this sense, the almanacs are the records that encapsulate Tolstoy’s daily states by indexing ideas that occupied him at a given moment; in them, Tolstoy’s thinking is not narrated directly, or reflected through the voice of a narrator or a protagonist, but is mediated through the voices of other “wise men.” The almanacs function as a sort of spiritual diary where the “consciousness of Lev T.” is merged with “the consciousness of the whole world” (Paperno 264). The almanacs’ reader is not only guided in his or her own thinking as prompted by Tolstoy the teacher, but is also allowed insight into the workings of the writer’s inner world.

At the height of his career as the “Great Sage,” Tolstoy creates an authentic account of his moral development and makes it accessible to a general readership for teaching purposes, as well as for the specific and personal purpose of documenting his own spiritual progression. Generalized and distilled of anything explicitly private or particular, the *Path* is a “book of life” by the celebrity author whose biography had become public property. Uniquely formatted as an anthology of world wisdom, *Path of Life* exemplifies the end result of the progression that started with keeping prescriptive diaries, to writing a confessional autobiography, to making a didactic day-by-day, step-by-step guidebook for Everyman. In the *Path*—as a confession of his mistakes and a profession of his beliefs—Tolstoy both scrutinizes and actively fashions himself while he shares this process with the public. He moves between using the text as a venue for public outreach and as a form of private self-assessments that provide him with an opportunity to document his life.

Viewed as a continuation of Tolstoy’s confessional life writing projects, the seemingly

radically impersonal format of the *Path* is not conflicted with its complex, enjoined aims. In this updated version of religio-philosophical autobiography, which is predictably filled with themes of spiritual accounting, Tolstoy tries to “write himself” into a new life, as many other confessing autobiographers have done before. The *Path* is a sort of spiritual autobiography in which Tolstoy’s ideas for a new life grow out of his wish to reform himself and to undo his past. The personal narrative reveals universal truths; the backward look over the course of life functions as a guide in finding one’s way to God. By probing their memories, these thinkers not only arrive at a more responsible self-knowledge but also formulate general life principles applicable to all. The author sees not only the educational potential but also the power to undo and relive his own life with the aid of writing and circulating a text of an instructional nature. In such an emended edition of his life, or more accurately, the “new method of living,” the author can be other than himself, a new self, and the anonymous universal Everyman.

The thinly veiled autobiographical inclusions into the *Path*’s textual mosaic continue to recall Tolstoy’s ongoing struggles with the self and struggles to live a better life. In a sense, Tolstoy’s erroneous life came to an end following his spiritual crisis. Already in his 1882 *A Confession*, in the pivotal chapter four, following the early autobiographically themed chapters, Tolstoy indicated that his life “had stopped.” What succeeds this breaking moment of conversion is an account of his spiritual rebirth. In the subsequent, still autobiographical chapters, Tolstoy documents his search for faith and shows how he “lives” and acts out his new ideas. The *Path*’s main emphasis is on formulating the ideas for living according to his new philosophy of life, not on retelling his actual life story. As Tolstoy’s religious philosophy becomes a way of life—he no longer engages in rational justification of his faith but instead actively lives his personal faith—the documentation of his

life changes from an autobiographical narrative to a religio-philosophical treatise. And, the shift from autobiographical to *autobiosophical* or *philosophical* is captured in the *Path*'s unusual format.

### Technology of the Self, Technology of Power

If it is indeed a new form of spiritual autobiography, the *Path*'s seemingly impersonal and explicitly dogmatic and abstract form is justified and even expected. The substitution of personal for general, which the *Path* so emphatically does, is both a function and a result of its being a confessional text. In fact, as Foucault points out, this substitution is the main operating mechanism of confessional literature. Foucault continuously examines the role of confessional power in structuring the modern subjectivity, most notably in his books *The Theory of Sexuality* (particularly Parts 1 and 2) and *Discipline and Punish, Technologies of the Self*, lectures such as *Truth and Juridical Forms*, (1973), *Abnormal* (1974–1975), and essays such as “Writing the Self.” Foucault treats confession as an essentially metonymical practice—a claim that allows him to propose confession as a crucial element in the development of the modern system of power where abstract origins are substituted for particular actions. As Tell aptly sums up, “Foucault had indicted the confession as a technology of examination, the metonymical function of which was to substitute an abstract origin for concrete events. This origin, created by confession, then functioned as the point of application for power” (Tell 107). Following Foucault's conception of the knowledge of the self, where such knowledge is achieved through a process of abstraction, the “knower” is separated from his actual body and made into a “mere *abstractis*” through rhetoric (Tell 100). Tolstoy exercises this abstraction all throughout his autobiographic discourse reaching the ultimate degree of universalizing in *Path of Life*.

The troubling, as Foucault sees it, absence of the particular is actually demanded by the

confessional system, specifically by its pedagogic power to control. Foucault shows confession as a fundamentally metonymic practice that serves to disassociate language from actual events and deeds in order to “attach it to abstractions in which particularities of the event were ignored” (Foucault 29; Tell 108). Or, as Tell puts it, this practice “implants” origins behind surfaces. “Confession, then, is not simply one more site in which the modern power may be observed; insofar as it is a technology by which power attaches itself to individuals, it is itself a condition of power” (Tell 113). In relation to Tolstoy's engagement with Christianity, it is important to note that, while exploring the means and processes by which the modern “man has become a confessional animal,” Foucault specifically focuses on Christian practices. If one follows Foucault's premise that confession is fundamentally metonymic, the *Path* exhibits precisely this metonymic shift where Tolstoy substitutes particular acts from his personal life for more abstract ideas of right and wrong. In order to develop a system of rules (and self-rules) and regulations, Tolstoy's specific individual failings and follies are replaced by universal ideas about man's sins. By abstracting his own life into fables and using borrowed wisdom, he is able to offer general ideas concerning universalizing notions of sexuality, morality, and faith.

The authoritative rhetorical mode obscures the autobiographical particularities, but only to an extent, and a quick excavation beyond the text's surface reveals Tolstoy's life in the *Path of Life*. The incurably solipsistic Tolstoy still points to himself, continuously revealing his life situation in his lesson-books. While the *Path*'s autobiographical function needs to be foregrounded, the text's function as an educational mechanism is obvious. The *Path* clearly strives to be an instrument of control and a model of self-control—a new expression of Tolstoyan Christian techniques of the self. Tolstoy could be seen as a Foucauldian practitioner of self-knowing and self-constructing

who reduces his particular life-situation to abstract concepts to achieve specific educational ends.

It follows then that the *Path* is a reasonable, even exemplary confessional-autobiographical expression by the author who, while recognizing his social influence, continues to work on himself. It fits within the trajectory of Tolstoy's autobiographical self-documenting and self-producing prescriptive oeuvre. His self-searching, retrospective spirituality finally evolves into a rhetorical exercise of power over himself and over his readers. Such a prescriptive rulebook for living gives him a chance to "un-live" his own life when, as a private individual, he too follows the rules set by Tolstoy the Sage. Tolstoy extends his self-effacingly evaluative efforts beyond the religious confessional mode into the more universally applicable and controlling authoritative technique of self-building. From a means of knowing oneself, life writing becomes an instrument for the care of others. And the *Path* places the emphasis not on the actual life of errors, but on the reformative potential of the ideal life.

A finalizing work in an autobiographically accented oeuvre, this gesture of apology for the Great Man and mankind is born of a conflation of styles, genres, aims, and voices, in which the qualities of spiritual autobiography and confessional writing cannot be ignored. Yet, a dogmatic, salvific treatise, *Path of Life* is a solitary enterprise and an expression of Tolstoy's private individual consciousness. And, as the concluding, summarizing statement in his spiritual journey, the *Path* provides autobiographical insight in a format outside of autobiographical and memoir genre conventions.

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