

Title: Horses and the Hive Mind: To Be or Not To Be Conscious in Andrei Platonov's *Kotlovan*
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Abstract:

This paper examines the attitude taken towards conscious versus unconscious states of being in Andrei Platonov's novel *Kotlovan*. While one would expect that being "soznatel'nyi" would be coded as highly positive in a Soviet novel, an analysis of *Kotlovan* suggests that it is far more interested in unconscious states, such as sleep or forgetting. The less of a mind one has, the better a socialist citizen one seems to be. Unconsciousness, or "nesoznatel'nost'," is directly contrasted with "zadumchivost'." Characters like Voshchev and Prushevsky, who seem unable to stop thinking, are always sad, frequently unable to sleep, and are repeatedly accused of being "unconscious" in a political sense, despite the fact that they seem to be more conscious than the others in the word's literal meaning. While one "cure" the novel seems to propose for combatting "zadumchivost'" is exactly what we expect, labor, characters are just as often advised to go to sleep in order to stop thinking. The paper surmises that unconsciousness is desirable within *Kotlovan* because it is what enables the characters to collectivize. Collectivization in the novel seems to consist in part of creating a hive mind, which is first seen when a group of horses collectivize themselves, and shown further during and after the formation of the kolkhoz. The kolkhoz does not consist of individual peasant minds, but is an entity with many bodies that speaks and acts as one. However, although unconsciousness is valued throughout the text, the novel's end suggests that the kolkhoz's ability to think only of collectivization is more of a problem than an asset. The kolkhoz does not grieve Nastya's death the way the primary characters do, and Platonov seems to suggest that although thought and sadness are inseparable from one another, it is better to be able to grieve than not.