

Title: "Young and Healthy Worms": Lev Tolstoy on the Ladder of Being

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In his seminal study *Tolstoy in the 1860s*, Boris Eichenbaum demonstrates how the philosophical and aesthetic doctrines of *War and Peace* are indebted to the ideological environment of its time, particularly the debate over historical forces and the laws of history. In the proposed paper, I connect the psychological (or more precisely, spiritualist) aspects of the novel and concurrent debates of the 1860s concerning the essence of the soul and its existence in the afterlife. These psychological dimensions of the novel are, in turn, intimately related to the historical. I will focus on the famous description of Prince Andrey's dying dream, which Konstantin Leontiev once called, "a crowning achievement in the field of psychic analysis." (K. Leont'ev, "O romanakh L. N. Tolstogo: Analiz, stil', veianie: Kriticheskii etiid," *Russkii vestnik*, nos. 6-8 (1890): 237.) Drawing on this scene (and a number of its draft versions), I will illustrate the ideological context of and the means by which *War and Peace* approaches the theme of the evolution of the human soul, or, as the spiritualists of the time would have put it, the ascent of the soul to the next step on the ladder of existence. I argue that in his epic, Tolstoy struggled with and eventually rejected various conceptions of the evolution of the soul that had been debated during the "awakened" 1860s. The result of this struggle with the "spirit of the age," was the creation of a kind of negative pneumatology (the theory of spiritual beings or phenomena) equally juxtaposed to materialist and spiritualist doctrines.