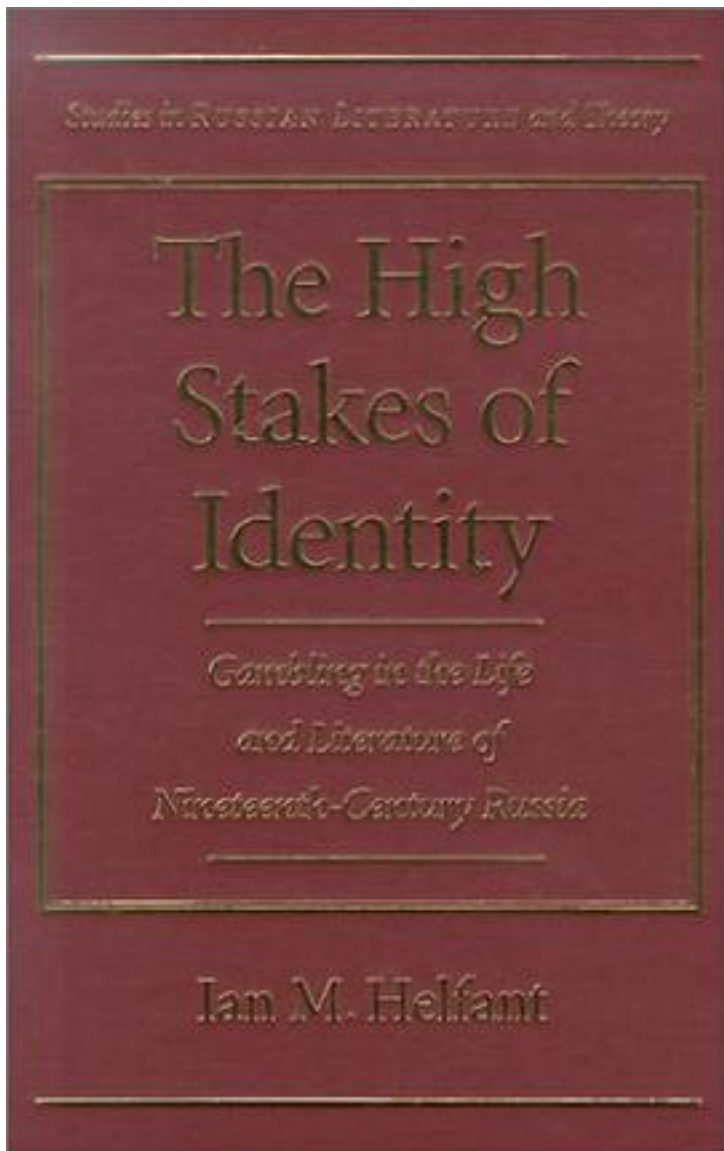


# The High Stakes of Identity



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Russian life and literature of the nineteenth century abounded with scenes of gambling -- nowhere more prominently than in the lives and work of three of Russia's greatest writers: Aleksandr Pushkin, Leo Tolstoy, and Fedor Dostoevsky. Focusing on the intersection of gambling performances in society and in literature, this book reveals the significance of gambling as an index of character in nineteenth-century Russia. During the reigns of Aleksandr I and Nicholas I, Ian Helfant argues, gambling became an essential proving-ground and symbolic locus for noble identity in Russia -- a way for the nobility to assert its values (fearlessness, disdain for money, implacable self-possession, deification of whim and will, and stylish performance) in the face of nineteenth-century economics and bourgeois sentimentality. In *The High Stakes of Identity*, Helfant's twin concerns are to analyze the structural components of the myth of the noble "beau joueur" and to show how gambling performances in society and in literature reciprocally reinforced, complicated, and eventually disintegrated its mystique. Helfant reconstructs both the prevalence and the particular codes of gambling. These codes allow him to interpret the iconoclastic performances of truly legendary gamblers and to assess the importance and purpose of gambling in works ranging from Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" to Mikhail Lermontov's "Masquerade".

作者介绍:

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