



# Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880-1930 (Medicine and Culture)

*Irina Sirotkina*

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The vital place of literature and the figure of the writer in Russian society and history have been extensively studied, but their role in the evolution of psychiatry is less well known. In *Diagnosing Literary Genius: A Cultural History of Psychiatry in Russia, 1880-1930*, Irina Sirotkina explores the transformations of Russian psychiatric practice through its relationship to literature. During this period, psychiatrists began to view literature as both an indicator of the nation's mental health and an integral part of its well-being. By aligning themselves with writers, psychiatrists argued that the aim of their science was not dissimilar to the literary project of exploring the human soul and reflecting on the psychological ailments of the age.

Through the writing of pathographies (medical biographies), psychiatrists strengthened their social standing, debated political issues under the guise of literary criticism, and asserted moral as well as professional claims. By examining the psychiatric engagement with the works of Fyodor Dostoevsky, Nikolai Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, and the decadents and revolutionaries, Sirotkina provides a rich account of Russia's medical and literary history during this turbulent revolutionary period.

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