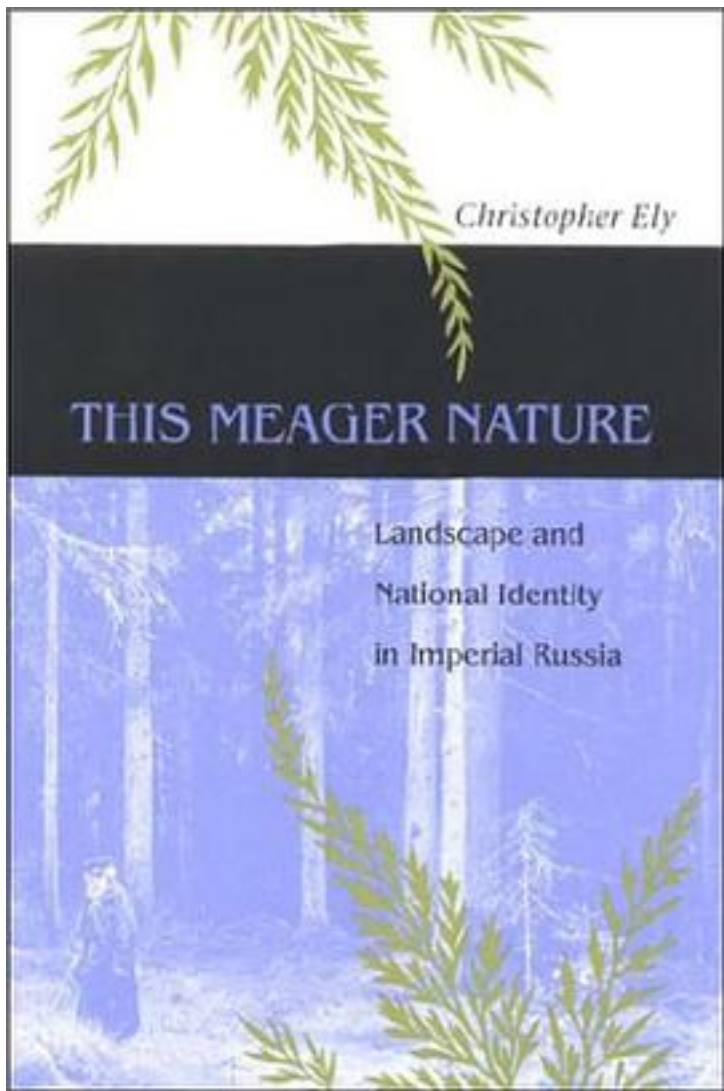


This Meager Nature



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* Boundless Russia, humble and strong - such visions of the "motherland" became crucial markers of Russian national identity. This Meager Nature is the first full-length study to trace the construction of Russia's cultural landscape, showing how nineteenth-century representations of nature reflected and shaped Russians' ideas about themselves and their nation. Important as the appreciation of landscape would become, in the early 1800s Russians commonly accepted the European judgment that their land lacked aesthetic value. That view changed dramatically with the outpouring of literary and artistic creativity that accompanied the century's political upheavals. Discovering a new landscape aesthetic in the writings and paintings of the day, Russians embraced their land's modest beauty, which had come to represent strength, authenticity, and hidden grandeur. The historical creation of Russia's sense of place resulted not so much from its citizens' encounters with their environment, Ely argues, as from their long-term struggle to distinguish Russia from Europe. The appeal of the modest beauty of the Russian land served to assert the genuineness of Russia against the inauthenticity of western Europe. For those who embraced it, the "meager" beauty of the Russian landscape provided a powerful means for experiencing and expressing Russian identity. Interdisciplinary in scope and enriched with illustrations of Russian landscape painting, This Meager Nature will appeal to all who are interested in landscape history and in Russian art and culture.

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