

Rees, Ellen. 2014. *Cabins in Modern Norwegian Literature: Negotiating Place and Identity*. Lanham: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press. 191 pages. ISBN: 978-1-61147-648-4.

Ellen Rees's *Cabins in Modern Norwegian Literature* examines the meaning of the Norwegian cultural symbol of the *hytte* [cabin], as well as other similar locations, in Norwegian literature and culture from the eighteenth century to the present. In Norway today, the *hytte* is a commonplace retreat in the Norwegian countryside, so common that most Norwegians own or have access to a *hytte* in the mountains, on the coast, or in the forest. Rees's careful study is insightful and casts a critical eye on the Norwegian nostalgia for an imagined past and an ancestry conceptualized in cabin life. Rees relates how locations, particularly the *hytte* and the *seter* [shieling, mountain dairy, summer farm], are integral to the constant renegotiation and reconceptualization of Norwegian national identity. The analysis is centred on Michel Foucault's concept of "heterotopia," which Rees defines as "a particular type of social space that functions on numerous registers simultaneously, and that has far more affective and social significance than it would appear to warrant on the surface" (2). Rees uses literary depictions of the Norwegian *hytte* and Foucault's six variants of heterotopia (heterotopias of crisis, heterotopia of deviation, heterotopias of accumulating time, temporal heterotopias, heterotopia of illusion, and heterotopias of compensation) to show how the depiction, purpose, and meaning of the Norwegian *hytte* has drastically morphed from being a home of the poor, to a trope of moderation, to a location that is erotic and supernatural, and to, as of today, a location of leisure retreat.

Chapter 1, "The *seter* as a Transgressive Allegorical Home," considers the ways in which the *seter* acts as the national romantic precursor to the *hytte*. The texts analyzed in this chapter were published between the 1770s and 1850s by both famous authors (Camilla Collett and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson) as well as lesser-known authors. Integral to the location of the *seter* is the national romantic icon of the *budeie*, which this chapter uses to illustrate the gendered role the *seter* plays in Norway's national imagination. Chapter 2, "Cabin, Class, and Nation," examines early nineteenth-century texts in relation to social class and national identity construction. While under Swedish rule, class consciousness is highlighted in these texts and the *hytte* is shown to be a signifier for the working poor, lumberjacks, hunters, fisherman, etc.—quite the contrast to the *hytte* in Norwegian society today. Chapter 3, "The Hunter's Cabin as Anti-Modern Retreat," explores the development of the *hytte* as a symbol of Arctic exploration and manhood, a place of masculine isolation. Rees analyzes well-known late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts as a masculine contrast to the earlier described feminine *seter*. Chapter 4, "The Golden Age of Cabin Therapy," via an examination of

interwar and early post-war literature, describes the emergence of the (fictional) classic Norwegian cabin culture, one in opposition to urbanity and modernity. This chapter highlights a period of drastic change in the conceptualization of the *hytte*, where cabins became recreational, accessible to the general public, and entered the genre of Norwegian crime fiction. Chapter 5, “The Post-Cabin in Late Modernity,” begins with a fascinating question, “How large and luxurious can a cabin be before it ceases to function and signify as a cabin and becomes something else instead?” (151). How has Norway’s new-found wealth combined with the country’s values of moderation and modesty affected the national symbol of the *hytte*? Rees explores the complexity of late modernity and highlights two trends: a reconceptualization of cabins as gendered spaces and a “commentary upon the perceived golden age of social democratic cabin culture through parody, adaptation, nostalgia, contrast, and/or irony” (154). Three images accompany Rees’s analysis as complementary visual depictions of the location of the *hytte* transforming throughout time and text. The images are a necessary link of Rees’s literary analysis to the physicality of her subject (the *hytte*). It is clear in these images that the *hytte* has not only changed in Norwegian collective consciousness and in literary history but has also physically morphed in location, size, appearance, and décor.

The wealth of literature referenced in this book is incredible and occasionally overwhelming, but it serves to provide ample evidence of a changing conceptualization of cabin life in Norway. Rees is not the first scholar to explore the *hytte* in Norwegian literature. A discussion of the *hytte* is common in Norwegian crime fiction, the Norwegian horror film genre, in Norwegian national romantic literature, among other genres. Rees’s project, however, is unique as it is based in an historical literary analysis. Rees convincingly complicates the signifier of the *hytte* as a fixed singular genealogy, in spite of the perception of a classical Norwegian cabin culture, and demonstrates that *hytter* in Norwegian literature and culture are conceptualized and actualized differently across time, location, and perspective.

I had the fortunate opportunity to read and review Rees’s book while at my family’s *hytte* in Rogaland, Norway—in fact, a real estate listings page detailing luxury cabins for rent and available plots for sale that I ripped from a table magazine served as my bookmark. I must say, I highly recommend this location for a reading of Rees’s historical exploration of Norwegian cabins. My *tante* Eli-Tove and her two daughters—a group of women who have served over the years as my own personal Norwegian cultural interpreters—accompanied me up into the mountains to their beautiful cabin. My journey through Rees’s literary history occurred simultaneous to a crash course in contemporary cabin culture: hikes in the mountains, the sound of wandering sheep, family meals, relaxation, wool sweaters, mowing grass roofs, and satellite TV/an Internet connection. They apologized for the available technology and convenience (running water,

plumbing, TV, Internet), explaining that unfortunately Norwegians don't value "*ekte hytter*" [authentic/actual cabins] anymore. On our hikes, they pointed out *ekte hytter* as well as those far more luxurious than theirs—which seemed to be explaining how their *hytte* fell somewhere in between Norway's frugal past and its gluttonous future. There was a sense of confusion and guilt surrounding their definition of *ekte hytter*—possibly due to a misunderstood imagined past? These conversations elucidated that Rees's book highlights and complicates well-accepted and ingrained cultural tropes, themes, and beliefs. It was enlightening to read Rees's book in the location of its study as her project connects a physical and still potent cultural symbol of leisure with its historical literary and cultural depictions.

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