

Realism and Henrik Ibsen

Starting out I had my own initial ideas, knowing I was interested in A Doll's House by Henrik Ibsen and Lovesong by Abi Morgan. Specifically the time period of A Doll's House, and the experimental way Love Song is written. I had a lot of knowledge surrounding Doll's House and Love Song because I had felt passionate about reading and researching them, and so I felt more comfortable in exploring their themes and analysing them. During our first discussion we talked about our favourite plays, finding what we had in common was A Doll's House, so we began to unpack themes, subject matter, and production elements.

After discussing the play, we felt we should broaden our topic, as Doll's House felt too restrictive. So we decided on a mixture of Realism and Henrik Ibsen. This gave us scope to research into the history of realism and how it went on to develop - as well as looking into Ibsen as a person and different plays he had written. Starting with A Doll's House, which we could then build off of, going into feminism and Ibsen's unique presentation of women for the time.

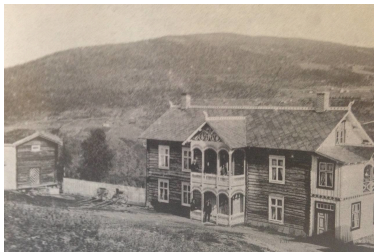
I decided to do my research around Realism at the time of Ibsen, looking into what events were happening in the late 19th century and how Norway was affected by them. I wanted to deepen my research by looking at what inspired Ibsen's interest in Realism and how he impacted Realism in a unique way- hoping to gauge an idea of what made him the 'Father of Realism'.

I began my research by building a foundation of knowledge of Realism around the late 19th century, discovering it became popular in the 1870s. I looked into how political tensions and the industrial revolution encouraged cruelty towards working classes. These tensions between classes reached a breaking point at the end of the 19th century, leading to a strong desire for change in society and a longing for the common man to be represented in media, leading to the rise in Realism. In Realism 'art had a purpose in bettering mankind' (Trumbull, 2009), many writers hoped they could make a significant impact by creating art that challenged the behaviours of the upper classes, Ibsen being one of them. Whilst in Norway, the aftermath of their transfer to a union with Sweden in 1814, was a mixture of longing to assert a distinct Norwegian culture and independence, and suffering the effects of the struggle between France and England that left them isolated and in an economic crisis (Sandvik and Joys, 2024). It was because of these things that Ibsen was a significant figure in Norway, his success made him a symbol to Norway.

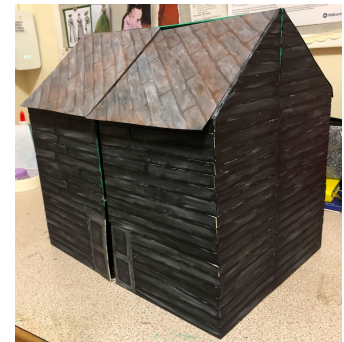
This led me into Ibsen's personal experiences impacting his longing to challenge gender and class. Beginning in his childhood, when he experienced financial difficulties and first witnessed the sacrificial powerless role women had in society. A quote from Ibsen's sister reminded me of Nora; Ibsen's sister said about their mother that 'she sacrificed herself time and again'(Norwegian Ibsen Company), whilst Torvald (Nora's husband) declares "But no man would sacrifice his honour for the one he loves." to which Nora responds, "It is a thing hundreds of thousands of women have done."(**Act three, A.D.H.**) In Ibsen's youth, Henrik Wergeland was the national poet, Wergeland worked in politics fighting for equality (Norwegian Ibsen Company). Witnessing the injustices the working class and women faced, alongside his admiration for Wergeland, were what probably motivated Ibsen to explore these things in his work. I then looked into what made his take on Realism so impactful. He

was seen as one of the most influential realist writers because he captured both realism in society as well as the world of the play- not only with set and costume, but with his creation of complex characters (Sparknotes). If he hadn't created an accurate representation of the world, his presentation of issues within that world would become less effective. From my research, I can conclude that Henrik Ibsen gained his title of the 'Father of Realism' through pushing realism into mainstream theatre, at a time when it was needed most (Testbook, 2023). (Mangang, 2021)

As my creative contribution, I was considering constructing a historically accurate bustle piece for one of the actors to wear. I began research into costume and clothing of the 1870s and having done this, we visited the costume store. I knew I was looking for floor length skirts with an appropriate shirt and jacket we could layer- the bustle creating the popular silhouette of volume at the back and flat at the front (Franklin, 2020). We found these things, along with a white lace collar (a popular adornment for clothing in the late 19th century). This costume was perfect for Nora, who I had imagined would wear black, as she was in mourning from her father's death and was struggling financially- as dyes cost a lot of money (Benson, 2016), which she didn't have.



After this, it was confirmed my contribution would be a set model for A Doll's House. I began my research into how houses in Norway in the 19th century were designed, finding images of a region of Norway that inspired Ibsen (Marcus, 2020). This



impacted how I designed the exterior, seeing it was common for houses to be clad in dark wooden planks, with pointed roofs, I ensured my design included both. Historical accuracy was important to me, as I wanted it to heavily base in realism, something that was equally important to Ibsen whilst writing the play. I had always liked the idea of the set mimicking an actual doll's house, with the audience seeing the exterior and then the house opening up at the front to reveal the inside, emphasising the play's message. After I had settled on my design, I constructed the model out of some mount board, card, and acrylic paint- using masking tape to hinge the doors and the opening. I gave the walls a wash of dark green paint, choosing this colour as I had envisioned the interior to be warm, rich, and embody Christmas time. I did the interior floor with floorboards, and later clad the exterior of the house and painted this a dark grey, contrasting the dark brown of the flooring.



Throughout this module, I was really grateful for the opportunity to read many plays I wouldn't have considered reading before. I loved exploring different playwrights and time periods alongside analysing themes and texts. On top of this, I'm really proud of the model I created for A Doll's House, it was the first independent modelmaking I had done for a project and I would love to do more of it. Next time, I would improve my model by including more

details and maybe expanding on one of the interior rooms. I really enjoyed getting to work with the actors collaboratively during the presentation. Although I would have preferred for the presentation brief to not have been as vague, I appreciate the broad scope it gave us to work on something we were all equally passionate about. I struggled with the presenting aspect of the module, as public speaking is not one of my strengths. Despite this I am happy with how the presentation went, but I think I could still improve on my presentation skills.



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Appendix

