



IS IT MODERN?

BY MEGAN ODLAND, DRAMATURG

A Doll's House, first produced in 1879, falls under the "modernist period" of drama ranging from the late 19th to early 20th centuries. Rather than plays that centered heavily on plot, structure, action and character development, modernist plays shifted their focus primarily to dialogue and intellectual debate. In other words, playwrights, like Ibsen, were more concerned about realistically representing the world around them, rather than adapting it for the sake of the play. As George Bernard Shaw puts it, "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself."

Since the early 20th century, "Modernism" has mostly become an umbrella term of the overall period that spans work from early avant-garde experimental drama of the early 20th century to writers like Eliot, Pound and Woolf. However, I would challenge us to redirect our gaze unto trust modernist playwrights, like Ibsen and Shaw, and consider that certain pieces of theatre deserve the term "modernist" for the way they accurately reflect the society around them at the time, rather than just being coined the term "modern" because they were written during the modernist period.



While much of Europe erupted with controversy over *A Doll's House*, early feminist press extensively valued the play for the way Ibsen captured the true modern woman of the time with the same rigor and excellence as other modernist playwrights. Interestingly enough Ibsen had no intention or specific interest in uplifting the women's movement and is very vocal about the fact that he just aimed to write a play that captured a realistic human experience for both men and women. Being that he successfully captured the life of 1879 Norway, as declared by feminist voices in the modernist theatre movement, Ibsen's play was truly deserving of the title.

In approaching our production of *A Doll's House*, utilizing the contemporary adaptation by Amy Herzog, we must confront how this astounding play will resonate with the modern audience of today. In 2025, where women do have the right to take out money at the bank and control their finances, where does this play still resonate? Can any of its original modern messages of 1879 Norway still resonate with our society today? Where does this play uplift the cry of women's rights and current feminist movements, and where does it fall short? Does Nora's final decision in this play still make audience members uncomfortable, or shocked?



A Doll's House, The Original 1879 Production

Ponder: What about this image feels close, or distant to you? Relatable or unrelatable?