

Student's Name Goes Here

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The Practices of Dr. Rank

In the play *A Doll House*, by Henrik Ibsen, the convention of marriage is examined and questioned for its lack of honesty. The play is set in the late 1800s, which provides the backdrop for the debate about roles of people in society. Ibsen uses the minor character, Dr. Rank, to help develop the theme of conflicts within society. This, in turn, creates connections with the plot. Dr. Rank's function in the play is to foreshadow, symbolize, and reflect upon the truth of life and society and to break down the barrier between appearance and reality.

One function of Dr. Rank in the play is to foreshadow events to come. Upon Rank's introduction in Act I, the reader is immediately given insight into the conflict Nora will face with Krogstad. Rank provides the reader with minute details into Krogstad's past that will help in understanding his desperate blackmail attempt. The reader can begin to see this in Rank's statement to Nora and Mrs. Linde: "Oh, it's a lawyer, Krogstad, a type you wouldn't know. His character is rotten to the root--but even he began chattering all-importantly about how he had to *live*" (I.ii.34). Rank also foreshadows the change of society that is a constant throughout the play. One can begin to see this foreshadowing in the statement Rank makes about the morally sick being forgiven, "That's the concept that's turning society into a sanatorium" (I.iii.45). Through these insights, Dr. Rank provides the reader with an ability to form opinions important to the plot.

Ibsen also uses Rank as a symbolic tool, enabling the reader to look deeper into the plot. Dr. Rank is used as a symbol of a dying society as the main characters in the play portrayed it to be. Rank's illness, tuberculosis of the spine, is used by Ibsen as a symbol of the deteriorating backbone

of society. It is also believed that Rank's illness is a product of his morally corrupt father, which widens the connection with society's ignorant beliefs. On the night of Rank's final examination, one can see the symbolic connection between Rank's death and the "death" of Nora and Torvald's marriage. This can clearly be seen in what happens after the statement Nora makes about receiving Rank's calling cards telling of his coming death, "That when those cards came, he'd be taking his leave of us. He'll shut himself in now and die" (II.i.67). It is with this extremely symbolic statement that the reader can see the connections between Rank, the death of a society which does not allow honesty in marriage, and the end of pretending by Nora. Almost immediately after Nora makes the statement about Dr. Rank, she decides to perform a final "examination" of her life and lets the letter from Krogstad be revealed. It is through the symbolism of Rank that the reader sees the deterioration of society as it was known by the main characters.

Another function that Dr. Rank serves is that of reflecting upon the true personalities of Nora and Torvald. Rank's friendship with Nora and Torvald is thought to be the same, yet they are independently different. Nora is able to talk more seriously with Rank than she is with Torvald. This aspect of Rank's friendship with Nora becomes evident in her statement:

You see, Torvald loves me beyond words, and, as he puts it, he'd like to keep me all to himself. For a long time he'd almost be jealous if I even mentioned any of my old friends back home. So of course I dropped that. But with Dr. Rank I talk a lot about such things, because he likes hearing about them. (II.iii.8-10)

From this statement the reader is able to understand that Nora is putting aside her true self to please Torvald. On the other hand, when she is with Rank she is no longer acting the part of a "doll." Rank's friendship with Torvald is also revealing, and through their friendship the reader can see Torvald's inconsistencies. In the play Torvald describes the effects of Krogstad's moral corruptness as "poisoning his own children with lies and pretense . . ." (II.iii.89). The reader can

connect this statement with the fact that Rank is also a product of a morally corrupt father, yet Torvald continues their friendship. Rank's friendship with Torvald reveals him to be a man who will act only in ways to benefit himself, not thinking of what he may have once declared to be truth. Ibsen uses Rank to make these truths about Nora and Torvald's personalities evident to the reader.

The roles that Ibsen gives Dr. Rank are crucial in the reader's understanding of the plot. The functions that Rank performs are able to move the story along, adding connections that force the reader to think about the appearance and reality of the major characters' personalities. The greatest achievement in the play is that of breaking down the walls of society, enabling Nora to evolve. Ibsen is able to do this through the connections he provides through Dr. Rank in *A Doll House*.

Work Cited

Ibsen, Henrik. *A Doll House*. *The Bedford Introduction to Literature: Reading, Thinking, Writing*. 5th ed. Ed. Michael Meyer. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999. 1564-1612.