

# A doctor in the house



A Doctor in the House Henrik Ibsen's character, Dr. Rank, in "A Doll's House" is an important component of the play, though he is not a lead character. Rank enhances the story in his own right as a character, but mainly serves a greater purpose as an accentuation of Nora's character. Nora's relationship with Rank is equal, and perhaps it implants in Nora's mind the idea that relationships should be equal. Their relationship brings up questions about social correctness and even the values necessary in a marriage. Essentially, Dr. Rank's purpose is to refine the audience's understanding of Nora's character. Dr. Rank's presence establishes the lack of communication between Nora and her husband. Nora confides in Dr. Rank, involving him in secrets and everyday conversation. For instance, Rank is the first character to be let in on Nora's secret plan to take Helmer on a "vacation," supposedly paid for by her father. Also, Rank refers to Christine Linde as "a name I have often heard in this house," when Helmer is virtually unaware of Linde's existence (Ibsen 542). The quote further indicates Rank and Nora share things in which Helmer is not included. Rank is like a messenger for the couple on one occasion when Nora finds out about Helmer's new job from the doctor. Nora asks Rank, "Tell me Dr. Rank--will everyone who works at the bank come under Torvald now?" (542). These conversations help to conclude that most of Nora's meaningful and informative conversation is not with her own husband. Furthermore, the doctor encourages Nora to confide in him; "You can say it to us...say it, here he is," says Rank, urging Nora to do as she wishes around him (542). Nora seems to divulge her thoughts to Rank and not Helmer, relaying an inward struggle in Nora to do as she wishes. She lies to Helmer about the macaroons, but hastily reveals her hidden snack to the doctor. Rank and Nora's relationship shows Nora's

longing for independence from Helmer and society's rules. Even Mrs. Linde, a relatively liberated woman, feels Nora's intimate relationship with the doctor is curiously inappropriate. Linde is shocked that Nora would speak with Rank about the debt behind Helmer's back, to which Nora replies, "I've got to get out of this other business; and that's been going on behind his back..." (549). Linde declares "You ought give up this business with Dr. Rank," making known the unprecedented state of Nora's relationships (549). Rank and Nora's relationship shows how Nora has inappropriately replaced Helmer with Rank, crippling the marriage further by hindering communication with her husband and driving her to become more independent. Nora's interactions with Rank also reveal her personality. Her knack for manipulating people is made evident when considers asking Rank for money to pay the debt. When Rank reveals his strong love for Nora, she becomes ridden with guilt--she cannot rationalize her actions (emotional blackmail) with ignorance. "How could you be so stupid," she says to Rank as he foils her previously innocent plan (552). Nora is not ignorant of her flaws, she merely masks them with a silly woman. Rank, however, brings out her truer characteristics. Her personality is also evident in the events surrounding Rank's death. She alone bears the responsibility of comforting Rank and telling Helmer. While she is not totally successful, "Nonsense! Cheer up! Laugh," the audience can see an amount of maturity in this scene (552). Through Nora's relationship with Rank we see a very independent woman, who is not silly, but intelligent and quick. The similar situations of Rank and Nora also help the audience to understand one of the main themes in the play, the social stigma of tainted heritage. Each of the characters' fathers were unprincipled in their actions. Rank's situation foreshadows how a

parent's immoral behavior would eventually cause his children to either suffer from or copy their parents' actions. Rank's father lead a promiscuous life, for which Rank would pay the price; " My poor innocent spine must pay for the fun my father had as a gay young lieutenant" (551). Nora carries the other consequence of a bad father; she is destined to have financial problems because she is her father's daughter. Helmer says, " Always on the lookout for some way to get money, but as soon as you have any, it just runs through your fingers...Well, I suppose I must take you as you are. It's in your blood. Yes, yes, yes, these things are hereditary, Nora" (537). Rank's tainted heritage helps the reader to see how the characters viewed a family legacy, and then in turn, the characters were judged by their family's heritage. Seeing how Nora and Linde view Rank's history is similar to how others see Nora's father, and then subsequently, how they see Nora. Ibsen makes the hereditary flaws available in Rank in order to make the theme clear. While Rank's flaws end with his death, Nora's bad traits threaten to rub-off on her children, continuing the line of bad heredity. According to Helmer, Rank's dark life " accentuates the light of their marriage," but the importance of the character, Dr. Rank, is to accentuate the darkness of Nora's life. Rank's life parallels Nora's situation until the role reversal at the end. Throughout the play, both suffer the consequences of morally corrupt fathers; Nora has her secret debt and Rank with his illness. Rank's announcement of death also marks the end of the masquerade, literally and figuratively speaking: Nora's masquerade of a content marriage is over as well as the ball that are her last moments of " fun." Instead of dying when Rank dies, however, Nora is reborn as an independent woman in society. Her situation may again parallel

Rank's; there is uncertainty associated with death as there is definite uncertainty as to Nora's fate.