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Comment on the dual significance of Dr. Rank as a mirror and a metaphor in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Woven into the fabric of the story of *A Doll's House* are the variegated yet complementary threads of minor characters such as Dr. Rank that blend in with the tale of the central characters and enrich the play. The role of the minor characters is perhaps more complex because they are planted by the playwright to fulfill multiple purposes such as character delineation, plot promulgation, or thematic exposure. Despite this thought process, much has been discussed and debated about the significance of Dr. Rank: he seems to be essentially ineffectual to the plot and does not seem to impact the characters very deeply. His very essence spells dissonance- his name, his health, his feelings for Nora- all are contradictory enough to invite a closer investigation. Additionally, the audience is not sure about the depth of his friendship with the Helmers because, in spite of a seeming close bond, the couple is strangely indifferent to his pain and his ultimate death. Then what is the significance of Rank? On sharper scrutiny, he appears to be fulfilling a twofold role: he is the mirror in which the truth of several characters is revealed; also, he has been presented as a metaphor of discord, disease, and death.

Commented [1]: Interesting approach

Commented [2]: clear thesis statement

Using Dr. Rank as a mirror, Ibsen depicts several characters and relationships in the play. Krogstad's moral depravity is explained through Dr. Rank even before the audience is able to judge it for themselves. Much before the audience meets Krogstad, Rank has revealed him to be 'morally diseased'. While in conversation with Nora and Christine Linde, Dr. Rank says "Krogstad, a fellow you don't know at all. He suffers from a diseased moral character, Mrs. Helmer." This dialogue is an intriguing irony since both Nora and Christine know Krogstad quite well. It also is ironic that Rank is being gentle and protective towards Nora while warning her of Krogstad's moral degradation when Nora is guilty of the same moral and legal transgressions. Rank serves to introduce Krogstad's character overtly and openly while at the same time foreshadowing Nora's subversive dealings and legal impropriety, thus acting as a mirror. Rank is also instrumental in foreshadowing and confirming certain traits of Torvald Helmer's character. When Torvald says in Act I that the "freedom or beauty" of a home is marred with loans and debts, it seems to be a general remark but gradually one realizes that Torvald is an aesthete: he craves all things beautiful and shuns the ugliness. Ibsen provides hints about this side of Torvald's character often enough; his possessive exclamation about Nora's beauty: "all the beauty that is mine, all my very own?" (P80) or Nora's awareness that Torvald is attracted to her physical charms and she will need something to hold him when her "dancing and dressing-up and reciting have palled on him" (P22) But all these lines are mere hints to Torvald's obsession for all things beautiful till this phenomenon is explained clearly by Dr Rank,

Commented [3]: it would be better to clarify whether the irony is situational or dramatic

*"There is something I want to tell
you. Helmer's refined nature gives him an unconquerable disgust at everything*

that is ugly; I won't have him in my sick- room." (P54)

Torvald who has been perceived as a strong and stolid protector of his family is suddenly revealed as a vulnerable man who has a juvenile revulsion for unpleasantness for "anything even remotely unattractive".¹ This input by Dr. Rank paves the way for Torvald's selfish and overstated reaction to Nora's forgery. The fact that his pretty doll has committed a crime steals the beauty of his home and life and he cannot accept that "The unutterable ugliness of it all! -- For shame! For shame!" (P86) Dr. Rank's analysis is proved to be true when Torvald rejects Nora's crime as ugly rather than illegal. The 'unconquerable disgust' that Rank mentions is manifested in the climactic and falling action of the play. Rank was also right in announcing that Torvald would not be allowed in his sickroom (P54) because he understands Torvald's abhorrence for death because it is ugly. Sure enough, when Rank announces his death through the black cards, Torvald brushes it off as 'something ugly' and 'horrors of death'. Rank once again becomes a mirror in which the reality of Torvald Helmer's innate weakness is communicated to the audience. Rank also helps to explicate Torvald's character by serving as a foil: "Dr. Rank ... is homeless and unhappy, whereas Helmer has a home and family and is the master of it. Dr. Rank is ... revolutionary in his sexual attitudes, whereas Helmer is a terribly conservative killjoy."² Helmer's righteousness is understood better in stark contrast to the moral laxity of the characters around him, especially his own wife and best friend. Thus Rank's prime purpose seems to be to help the audience interpret other characters better.

Commented [4]: excellent analysis of the mirror aspect of Dr. Rank with pertinent textual references.

The second crucial function of Dr. Rank serves is to metaphorically embody disharmony, disease, and death that are the chief motifs of the play. Ibsen has added mystery to the character of Dr. Rank by keeping his background vague and by weaving metaphors into his conversations as well as his character. While discussing fancy dress costumes Rank says: "At the next fancy-dress ball I shall be invisible... There is a big black hat... you put one on, no one can see you." (P83-84) The metaphor also serves as a euphemism for death besides adding a hint of magic and mystique to the exchange. Nora also changes out of a multi-colored shawl worn at the party into a black one when she discusses Rank's impending death, again reiterating the metaphor of darkness and death. It is evident that Ibsen uses Rank allegorically to convey his more cryptic subtext. Rank's very name denotes dissonance with the dual denotation of 'high status' and 'fetid'. There is a wide divide between the two meanings of the word and both seem to converge in the character of Rank. That his rank is higher than that of any other character is obvious when Mrs. Linde asks, "Is Doctor Rank a man of means?" (P47) and gets an affirmative reply from Nora. His social status stands for one meaning of his name and his diseased and rotting spine connotes the alternative meaning for his name. Oftentimes, studies

Commented [5]: good use of tricolon

Commented [6]: insightful

¹ Mohitoshd. "A Doll's House." *Scribd*. Scribd, n.d. Web. 11 Mar. 2016.

² "Parallelism and Contrast in A Doll's House." *Parallelism and Contrast in A Doll's House*. Bachelorandmaster.com#sthash.YMhx16xw.zUPgQsVJ.dpuf, n.d. Web. 03 Mar. 2016.

on Ibsen have pointed out Rank's disease as an Ibsenian metaphor for the moral deprivation of his society:

*"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."*³

Commented [7]: please cite

It does seem that Ibsen uses Rank's character to create connotations and undercurrents that aid audience understanding. The motif of children carrying the burden of their parents' sins is a recurrent one as Torvald keeps referring to the moral shortcomings of Nora's father or the impact of Krogstad's actions on his sons. Ibsen uses Rank's disease, which is hinted to be an inherited STD, as a reminder that sins demand expiation and the strain of moral disease leads to fatality- of man, home, or society. Rank is a diseased, dying doctor highlighting the irony that the source of health itself is tainted just as Nora's source of protection, Torvald, deserts her when she most needs protection. Another thing that Rank symbolizes is the Helmer marriage. Although Torvald calls Rank, "cloudy background to our sunlit happiness" (P84), there seems to be a strange connection between Rank's presence and their marriage. It seems that his constant presence in their home is the glue holding their marriage together. In fact he seems to be a metaphoric representation of the Helmer marriage: apparently healthy and happy but diseased and hollow on the inside. It seems that Helmers enjoyed the sunshine only in the presence of their 'dark cloud'. With the arrival of the cards with black crosses, (P84) their marriage seems to breathe its last too. Torvald finds the cards announcing Rank's approaching end on top of the disastrous letter, which heralds the end of the Helmer marriage. Denise Coday underscores the "connections between Rank, the death of a society which does not allow honesty in marriage, and the end of pretending by Nora... It is through the symbolism of Rank that the reader sees the deterioration of society as it was known by the main characters."⁴

Commented [8]: well- analysed

Commented [9]: This use of paradox makes the paper engaging

Dr. Rank becomes a conduit for conveying many Ibsenian ideas to the audience. He serves the purpose of illuminating other characters- from the moral corruption of Krogstad, to Torvald's inner frailty and Nora's attempts to flirt. As a metaphor, he provides patterns and motifs that help audiences to comprehend and link several themes and ideas. In this, Rank despite his lack of physical impact in the play gains significance as a mirror and metaphor.

³ Coday, Denise. "The Practices of Dr. Rank." The RSCC OWL,. Web. 8 Feb. 2016

⁴ Coday, Denise. "The Practices of Dr. Rank." The RSCC OWL,. Web. 8 Feb. 2016

Criterion A: Knowledge and Understanding of the text	5
Criterion B: Understanding of the use and effects of stylistic features	4
Criterion C: Organization and development	4
Criterion D: Language	5

This an excellent study of Dr. Rank and consummate handling of a complex question. Impressive display of knowledge of the play and each point made is supported by textual evidence. Impeccable use of subject specific language and vocabulary. Some points needed expansion and I thought the diction analysis could be better, hence you lost a mark each in criterion B and C
Very well done- 18/20