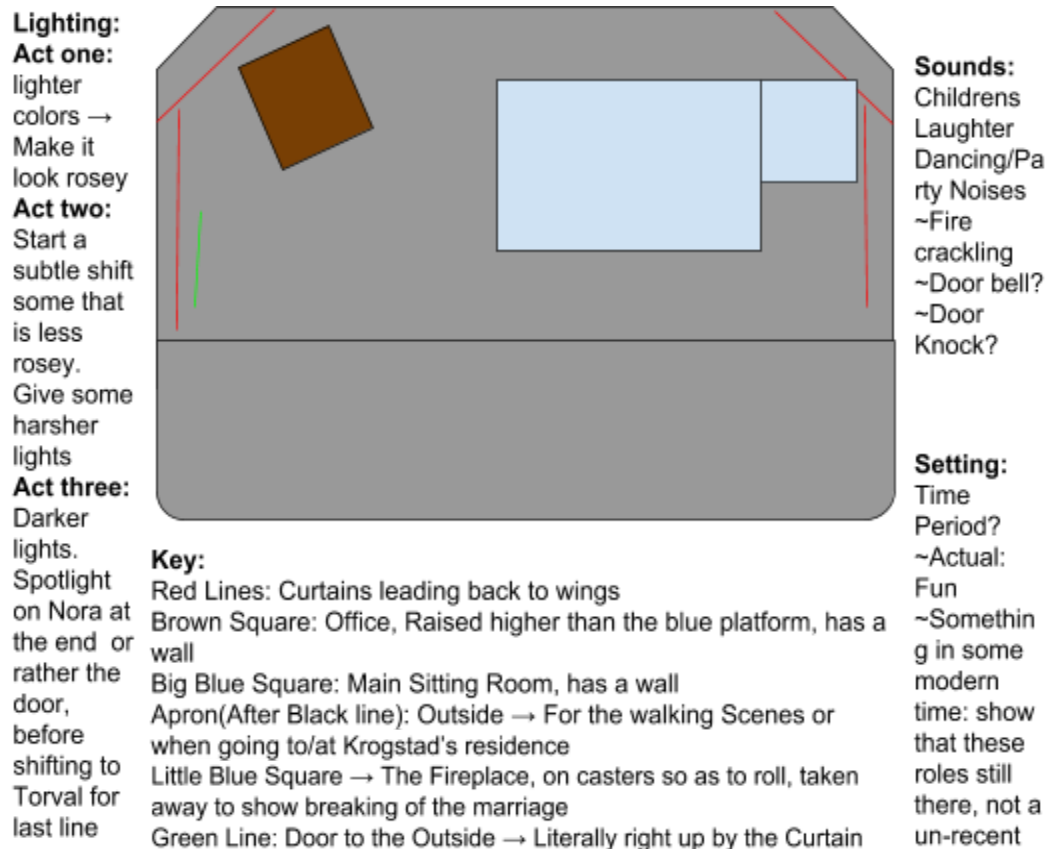


A Doll's House allowed one to see how a marriage between the 'average' victorian man and woman play out. We are being introduced subtly to the problems within the marriage and thus society. The play centers on the marriage of Nora and Torvald, a crime Nora committed to save Torvald's life, and the subsequent consequences when she is found out. Nonetheless, there are other characters within the play that give the play a substance and other perspectives through which to see the marriage. One of these characters is Dr. Rank. He is set in a way to suggest that he is society. Demonstrating how a society can crumble due to the disease within. Illustrating the process of going from greatness to nothingness.

Throughout my research on Dr. Rank it would seem that a lot of researchers ignore him in favor of looking at the dynamics between the three main characters of Nora, Torvald and Krogstad. Which is understandable as they are the main characters and have a lot of offer in terms of analysis. However I find Dr. Rank much more interesting to analyze.

Before analysis can begin looking at how the play should be set up is just as important. It allows for one to visualize how everything would play out.



This is a model of how I see the stage being set. The movie was able to add more spaces due to it being a movie. But I would simply have the apron be the outside and dance hall. Nothing really needed except some kind of small dance number. As far as setting went I am uncertain as to when the whole thing should take place or who should play what role. Do I do a role reversal to show how laughable it is, (I saw a commercial do this recently)? Or do I keep gender the same and up the time period, make it as recent as now or as less recent as the 1950s? I think it would translate into a very believable 1950s setting. I say that the brown platform would be raised it is supposed to show Torval's "power" over Nora as her domain would be the blue square. The main sitting room would be transformed and yet not, only by the lights. In the

original play script the setting never changes from their home. But I think to give time for set changes and give the actors a break I would have the small blue square and incorporate Krogstad's places as the movie did.

Dr Rank's timeline goes as follows:

Act one

- Dr. Rank stops by for a visit with Torvald.
- He tells us a little about Krogstad's unsavory past.
- He also philosophizes about life, death, and moral corruption.

Act two

- Dr. Rank tells Nora that he'll soon die.
- He admits his love for Nora.
- He watches Nora dance the Tarantella.

Act three

- Dr. Rank parties hard at the Stenborgs' place.
- He drops by one last time to see the Helmers.
- Dr. Rank puts two cards with black crosses in the mailbox, announcing his impending death.

When looking at the larger picture because Rank is painted as Society, Nora as the silently suffering victorian lady, and Torvald as the typical victorian male, society crumbles due to its own constraints and masks. With Rank as society this becomes more apparent as the play goes on. He is the information giver, Rank is the parallel between physical and moral sickness, and he is the idea that this is all going to end even if society do not want it to.

In act one a lot happens that will set up the story. We see the Helmer's marital problems, Nora's inner struggle, and Krogstad's past. However none of this is apparent at first. Then, Dr. Rank stops by (the script has him stopping by to see Torvald but I believe that he is really there to see Nora) and the information comes pouring out. Dr. Rank is the information character. He is there to tell the audience what it needs to know. It is a strange and curious thing that he doesn't do much more than that. Sure there is his professing of feelings for Nora but even that is brushed off in the face of his death.

With act one I would have Dr. Rank more or less normal, I would like to throw a hint of sickness whether it would be with make-up or movement. This would be especially apparent when he focuses on philosophizing of life, death and moral corruption. This can be taken to have Ibsen introducing his own opinion on the roles people play in society early in the play. For example, Dr. Rank states, "Certainly. However wretched I may feel, I want to prolong the agony as long as possible. All my patients are like that." This is in response to Kristina's question of everyone wanting to live. Through it Ibsen is commenting on our fear of the unknown. We as a society in many ways fear the end of something because it means changes. By prolonging whatever the instance is this means we do not have to change and can continue on in our lives.

On a technical note, I'd have the light go soft around Nora and Kristiana. I want Dr. Rank to be emphasized but we need to be able to see the ladies to see their reactions.

In Act two we learn that Rank is dying and that he loves Nora. When speaking of his impending death to Nora Rank states that it is "Nothing but what I have long been prepared for. But I certainly didn't expect it to happen so soon." With this Ibsen is claiming that people can see society is changing but they are not expecting it to come upon them so soon. It references back to the prolonged agony from Act I but also speaks to the idea that society has been crumbling for a while. At this moment Dr. Rank becomes the rich old man who will likely give his fortune to the young female he so greatly cares for. In contrast he is the character who does not hide behind society (Torvald) nor who hides within themselves (Nora) but is the character that is unconcerned with what society thinks of him. Precisely because he is the representation of the dying society. Within this act Rank states, "I cannot imagine for a moment what would have become of me if I had never come into this house." Society is dying. And the masks are about to come off. Though equally trapped the death of society should set them free. Not that they care or see it.

"With death stalking beside me?--To have to pay this penalty for another man's sin? Is there any justice in that? And in every single family, in one way or another, some such inexorable retribution is being exacted--" It is interesting that Dr. Rank mentions his disease as being both inherited and the symptoms involved the degeneration of the spine. This causes a furthering of the symbolism, of Dr. Rank as society, that the societal norms of the time were changing due to harm of past events. That the very backbone of society was crumbling due to the beliefs of the older generation. It is around Act two that I would have Dr. Rank move slower,

stiffer. Perhaps a pox that could barely be seen at the edge of fabric. If he's in a spotlight I'd like it to be green to give a feeling of sickness. It is equally interesting that the one dying is one that would profit the most of of this type of society. It could be the fact that he is society. And yet he never married. Perhaps he saw his mother or father die and suspected of what could befall him. Rank obviously knew that he was sick for sometime but has only now just decided to reveal it. Why? He is a dear friend who fears he will be easily replaced. His own fears are pushed aside whenever he speaks of his impending death. Is it because of his disease? Then again he never tells anyone exactly what he was dying from only hinting at it. It implies that death is easy to hide. That the death of a society is a slow thing. It happens over many years and people adapt to it, never really noticing the change. This continues throughout the play.

In Act three Dr. Rank is watching the dancing and partying having one last reveal and dying. This could be attributed to the time period itself, for example it is said that *A Doll's House* takes inspiration from the life of Laura Kieler. According to the Guardian, "Laura Kieler, who had written a novel in the 1860s, *Brand's Daughters*, and got to know the Ibsens - Ibsen called her his "skylark". In 1878 she sent the manuscript of another novel, hoping Ibsen would recommend it. He thought it was very bad and said so. She needed money because she had borrowed - as Nora does in the play - to take her tubercular husband to Italy to "save his life". On receiving Ibsen's letter she forged a cheque, was discovered, and treated like a criminal by her husband, who committed her to a lunatic asylum, taking her back only grudgingly." Now then, in the play Nora does not go to Dr. Rank for help, even though in the scene where Dr. Rank professes his love for Nora there is an undertone that she is going to ask Dr. Rank for money. But then is "too much of a lady of society" when he professes his love. The article goes on to

state that Ibsen has said, ““A woman cannot be herself in modern society. It is an exclusively male society, with laws made by men and with prosecutors and judges who assess feminine conduct from a masculine standpoint”;” Perhaps Ibsen was reflecting on he why he refused Laura Kieler’s plea. Perhaps in Dr. Rank, Ibsen allowed himself to show how society fails women like Laura and Nora.

In having Dr. Rank announce his death at the end of the play Ibsen is identifying society’s own end. This play was published in 1879. It is not quite at the turn of the century but the 19th century was full of change in what probably seemed like an extreme scale. Empires collapsed, Empires were born, Industry took off, landscapes changed, life changed. All the while some societies were baring the weight of rules that did not make sense anymore. By having Dr. Rank die from a syphilitic disease that causes the degeneration of the spine Ibsen demonstrates that the backbone of society is collapsing and that something new will take its places. That it is only a matter of time. This is highlighted by Dr. Rank stating, ““Excellently. Why shouldn't I? Why shouldn't one enjoy everything in this world?--at any rate as much as one can, and as long as one can.”” This phrase gets to the heart of the matter of the play.

The realizations that all the characters, except Dr. Rank, go through can be seen to be summed up into one existential question. How can we be happy when we hide who we are? Dr. Rank does not go through this because he is completely unapologetic about who he is. Even as he is dying he does not change. Pieces of him bare themselves to the world and tests are done but it changes nothing. The other characters will go on without noticing and he so easily replaced, will fade into a memory.

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An Interesting Thought - (Appendix A)

The only two facts that we know of the disease is that it is inherited and a symptom is the degeneration of the spine. Now then. After spending a few hours scouring medical websites and symptom lists, I believe that Dr. Rank had syphilis but that has changed to [Syphilitic Meningitis](#). It is the only disease that I have found that is inherited and causes both syphilis symptoms and spinal degradation. it would also mean that Dr. Rank is right and that he is going to die within a few months. As it takes pretty much getting all the way to stage 3 of syphilis for this disease to occur. And yet we don't see any pox on the Doctor. This could be because they [happened prior and have gone away or that they are so faint we do not notice them](#).

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