

Freud's Rat Man and the Mother Imago

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Yet another Rat Man study, and no doubt not the final word. As the only case in which Freud retained his original notes, other authors have noted the striking absence of references to Rat Man's mother in Freud's published version as compared to the original notes, but little has been made of the possible reasons or implications. This essay is an attempt to redress the balance by looking at Rat Man's Oedipal situation, Freud's theoretical stance on the Oedipus complex at that time, and Freud's own psychobiography.

INTRODUCTION

Like others reading Freud's case studies, this author was struck in the case of Rat Man (Freud, 1909a) by the emphasis on the father complex with little mention of Rat Man's mother. This imbalance in not exploring both parents' contributions to Rat Man's neurosis is apparent even in the published case study, but is even more astonishing when Freud's original case notes (Freud, 1909b) are examined which contain a wealth of material concerning the patient's relations to the women members of his family, as well as transference material to Freud's mother and his daughter Anna. This imbalance in not exploring Rat Man's triangular situation is significant in the light it throws on Freud's view of the Oedipus complex which, although he had not yet named it as such, he was in the process of clarifying at that time, and of course the case was published by Freud as a paradigm study of obsessional neurosis with no mention of its Oedipal nature.

The question arises why Freud chose to analyse the case in this way and three points might be considered. First, was Freud's one-sided analysis a reflection of his own psychobiography, in that the material was in many ways 'too close to home', an inability to explore his own mother complex? Second, could the fact that this was the only case where Freud kept his original notes, rather than following his usual practice of destroying them after publication, have been an indication that he considered re-approaching the case study, even of re-presenting it, as an example of the Oedipal situation? Or, third, is this simply an indication that at that time Freud did not yet see the Oedipal situation as a triangular complex, but rather saw its derivative the 'nuclear complex' as bipolar, between a child and one parent, in this case Rat Man's father complex?

In this paper the original and published notes are examined in the light of the above,

although it is not claimed as anything like a full analysis of Rat Man's Oedipus complex, which would have to be a much larger project. The relation of the material to Freud's own psychobiography will be touched on.

COMMENTS BY OTHER AUTHORS

Zetzel (1966) pointed out the discrepancy between the published case study and the original record in that the former contained only six 'brief, essentially unrevealing' references to Rat Man's mother, whereas the latter contained over 40 references to a 'highly ambivalent mother-son relationship' (p. 220).

Sherwood (1969), in an Appendix (p. 265), comments that 'One of the modern criticisms of the Lorenz [Rat Man] case is the virtual absence of any exploration of the patient's relationship to his mother', and points out that Rat Man's mother intruded even into the first session in the original record of the case, but not in Freud's published (1909a) version. He adds that 'a very different analysis might quickly emerge if the analyst's interests were different'. Sherwood attributes Freud's omissions as 'presumably dependant on the analyst's theoretical presuppositions and interests'.

Marcus (1984) comments that a reading of this case 'cannot overlook the virtual absence from it of Lorenz's mother'. As did Sherwood (see below), he points to three omissions from the first session of the published case study compared to the original notes, attributing Freud's 'narrowness of focus' on the father as 'characteristic of his culture as well ... [which places] the relation of father and child (particularly, of course, father and son) at the center of the human universe of development, passion and choice'.

Mahony (1986), in a whole book devoted to the Rat Man case, notes in passing that Freud 'elaborated but little upon the Oedipal links' (p. 178), and that 'the "Oedipal" mother in Freud's early works is a static figure who unknowingly plays out her destiny ... as a caricature, as "odd woman out"' (pp. 35-36).

Gay (1988) comments that 'Freud exiled mothers to the margins of his case histories', and that 'Rat Man's mother makes some fleeting appearances, mainly as the person whom the patient consults before he starts his analysis' (p. 505).

THE PUBLISHED CASE STUDY

Rat Man (real name Ernst Lanzer, but referred to in the published study as Paul, and in the

original notes as Dr Lorenz) approached Freud when he was 29 suffering from obsessions which had worsened over the previous four years. These consisted particularly of fears that something terrible might happen to two people of whom he was fond, his father and his ‘lady’ (Gisela), together with compulsions and prohibitions. In addition he said that ‘his sexual life had been stunted’ (Freud, 1909a, p. 158).

A number of points are selected below to illustrate Freud’s approach to the case, and to show that even in the published version aspects of the triangular situation are apparent, including Rat Man’s mother complex, but are left unanalysed by Freud.

- From the third session Rat Man spoke of the precipitating events which had caused him to consult Freud. These centred on military manoeuvres two months earlier when he had lost his pince-nez and wired for a replacement pair to be sent by post. During the same halt a Czech officer (Captain Nemecek) ‘obviously fond of cruelty’ recounted to him the now infamous story of the rat torture – of placing an upturned pot containing rats on a victim’s buttocks so that the rats bored into the victim through the anus. Simultaneously with hearing the story the idea ‘flashed through [Rat Man’s] mind’ that it ‘was happening to a person very dear to me’, in fact two persons, his ‘lady’ and his father (*ibid.*, p. 167).

The same evening Captain Nemecek handed Rat Man a packet which had arrived with his pince-nez and said ‘Lieutenant A has paid the charges for you. You must pay him back’ (*ibid.*, p. 168). This aroused a powerful conflict in Rat Man, a prohibition against paying back because if he did the torture would apply to his lady and his father, and a corresponding vow that he *must* pay back the money to avoid the punishment.

Freud interpreted the rat ideas in terms of Rat Man’s ambivalent feelings towards both his father and his lady.

However, the extremely convoluted procedure (*ibid.*, pp. 168–9) by which Rat Man intended to repay his debt for his pince-nez contained a major inconsistency which Freud did not seem to notice, and which fills out the interpretation. The procedure consisted in giving money to Lieutenant A, who would give this to the young lady in the post office, that the young lady would then give this money to Lieutenant B, who would then pay back this to Lieutenant A, ‘according to the wording of his [Rat Man’s] vow’.

Two pages later Freud notes that in fact Rat Man knew all along it was the girl at the post office who was owed the money (*ibid.*, p. 172), and that he knew this even before he formulated his vow. Freud doesn’t mention the glaring inconsistency that this elaborate procedure *leaves the girl un-reimbursed* (I understand this was also pointed out by Hawelka,

1974, in the French edition of the original record).

One explanation might be that paying back Lieutenant A was the dominant idea in Rat Man's mind as the means to appease the feared Captain Nemecek and ward-off the image of the rat torture: although subliminally aware the girl was owed the money, it didn't occur to him that she was left unpaid.

But he *knew* that she was owed the money, so a degree of repression must have been at work in the thought not arising consciously, and repressing his awareness that the girl was not paid amounts at least in part to an unconscious wish to withhold the payment, an expression of unconscious hostility, not to this girl in particular whom he did not know personally, but presumably to 'women'. Here in this scene there are two poles, the fear and hatred towards Captain N and the defensive appeasement, and Rat Man's unconscious hostility to women, a parallel to his ambivalent feelings towards his father and his lady.

To this might be added Freud's own counter-transference; why, given his usual precision, did he not notice or choose to mention the girl being left unpaid?

- During a summer holiday Rat Man was struck by an urge to 'make himself slimmer' (*ibid.*, p. 188), by running, because he was too fat (Ger. *dick*). Freud linked this through word association to Rat Man's jealousy of Gisela's cousin Richard (Eng. *Dick*), and interpreted the jogging as a *self-punishment* for his unconscious murderous rage against Dick. Looked at more closely, however, jogging and the word association can be seen to serve the purpose of unconsciously *attacking Dick* by getting rid of *dick*, rather than or as well as a self-punishment. Also it can be seen as satisfying two purposes, consciously making himself slimmer and more attractive to his lady, as well as unconsciously 'killing' his rival; in all a rather clever way of achieving both conscious and unconscious gains, without the fear of punishment if he had actually attacked Dick, and again it further represents a triangular, 'Oedipal' situation.
- Numerous examples of ambivalence towards his lady raise the obvious question of who his 'lady' represents, Gisela or his mother, but Freud seems not to have explored this area at all. For example, after clearing up a misunderstanding in which he feared Gisela had rejected him he was gripped by an 'obsession for understanding' (*ibid.*, p. 190) which Freud saw as '... a doubt of her love. A battle between love and hate was raging in the lover's breast, and the object of both these feelings was one and the same person' (*ibid.*, p. 191). Freud was talking of his 'lady' Gisela, but to what extent did this also apply to that other 'lady' his mother?

Later Freud comments ‘All through his life, moreover, he was unmistakably victim to a conflict between love and hatred, in regard both to his lady and to his father’ (*ibid.*, p. 237), but again the obvious extension to mother is not noted.

- Evidence that the Oedipal scene was at the root of Rat Man’s neurosis is present in the published case study even in the second session on one of the rare occasions when Freud mentioned Rat Man’s mother. There, Rat Man described sexual feelings towards two governesses in his sixth or seventh years, complaining to his mother about his erections ‘with some misgivings to get over’. At the same time he had ‘a morbid idea that my parents knew my thoughts’, and that if he thought such thoughts ‘*my father might die*’. Rat Man added significantly that ‘I look on this as the beginning of my illness’ (*ibid.*, p. 162).

Freud saw the ‘original meaning’ of Rat Man’s phantasies here as ‘If I have this wish to see a woman naked, my father will be bound to die’ (*ibid.*, p. 163), but did not pursue the role of Rat Man’s mother.

- Similarly, an impulse to masturbation came over him after reading how Goethe ‘freed himself in a burst of tenderness from the effects of a curse which a jealous mistress had pronounced upon the next woman who should kiss his lips after her’ (*ibid.*, p. 204). Freud pointed out the presence of both a prohibition and the defiance of a command, but did not pursue the likely connection to Rat Man’s Oedipal longing and ambivalent feelings towards his mother.
- Freud described the ‘conflict at the root of his illness’ as ‘a struggle between the persisting influence of his father’s wishes and his own amatory predilections’ (*ibid.*, p. 200), and that ‘If we take into consideration what the patient reported in the course of the first hours of his treatment [see above], we shall not be able to avoid a suspicion that this struggle was a very ancient one and had arisen as far back as in his childhood’. Freud explored the father’s prohibitions on his son’s sexuality, but not that aspect of his son’s sexuality which related to his mother.
- To this we might add a fascinating and revealing phantasy described by Rat Man in which his lady married a suitor of social standing in government office, and that ‘He himself then entered the same department, and rose much more rapidly than her husband, who eventually became his subordinate. One day... this man committed some act of dishonesty. The lady threw herself at his feet and implored him to save her husband. He promised to do so, and informed her that it had only been for love of her that he had entered the service, because he had foreseen that such a moment would occur; and now that her husband was saved, his

own mission was fulfilled and he would resign his post' (*ibid.*, pp. 194–5).

Freud recognised the repressed 'thirst for revenge' in this and other phantasies, but in this particular case, transposing mother for lady, a more poignant description of Oedipal rivalry would be hard to find.

ORIGINAL RECORD OF THE CASE

The first session

Sherwood (1969, p. 263) pointed out that the first session reported in the published version of the case omitted three significant comments of Rat Man which are found in the original record:

1. 'He also suffered from an impulse to do some injury to the lady whom he admired. This impulse was usually silent in her presence, but came to the fore when she was not there.'
2. 'His ideas [of injuring his lady or his father] only affected his professional work when it was concerned with criminal law.'
3. 'After I told him my terms, he said he must consult his mother.'

Sherwood described the first as showing the patient's ambivalence to his relationship; the second his sense of guilt associated with his obsessive thoughts; and the third led to his comment noted above of the lack of any exploration by Freud of the patient's relationship to his mother.

Within the field of time-limited psychotherapy in particular (see for example Mann, 1973, and Molnos, 1995) it has become increasingly recognised that a patient's core-conflict and transference can be seen even in the first session of a treatment; indeed some might go so far as to say that the *clearest* expression may be found in the first session which is as yet unclouded and confused by the resistances and counter-resistances which inevitably develop as therapy proceeds.

In Rat Man's first session there is clear evidence of Oedipal conflict, both his 'lady' and his father are the objects of his love and his fear of something happening to them. His fear of something happening to them alerts us to the possibility and likelihood of an underlying *wish* that something might happen to them, which in the case of his lady he admits to. His need to consult his mother signifies her 'presence' in the first session, and strengthens our supposition of an equation between his 'lady' and his mother. The core conflict therefore revolves around the Oedipal situation.

Transference towards Freud is also present. Even in this first session Rat Man talked of his sexual life, of it being ‘stunted’, and of masturbation. This almost homosexual submission to Freud, even to the extent of referring to his sexual life as stunted with the underlying image of his penis as inferior to his father’s/Freud’s, was also ambivalent. On the one hand wanting an idealised father confessor, but underlying this the seething resentment even in this first session when Freud told him his fees and he replied that he must consult his mother, as witnessed by his thoughts admitted to later in the analysis of ‘For each *krone* a rat for the children’ (Freud, 1909b, p. 288). (In the published version this appeared as ‘So many florins, so many rats’ (Freud, 1909a, p. 213).)

Oedipal scene

In the session of Oct. 18, Rat Man recounted a dream which he had had in Dec. 1906 or Jan. 1907, which ‘he cherished ... as though it were his most precious treasure’:

I was in a wood and most melancholy. The lady came to meet me, looking very pale. ‘Paul, come with me before it is too late. I know we are both sufferers.’ She put her arm through mine and dragged me away by force. I struggled with her but she was too strong. We came to a broad river and she stood there. I was dressed in miserable rags which fell into the stream and were carried away by it. I tried to swim after them but she held me back: ‘Let the rags go!’ I stood there in gorgeous raiment (Freud, 1909b, p. 268).

Freud commented that ‘He [Rat Man] knew that the rags meant his illness and that the whole dream promised him health through the lady’. But rags also mean poverty, and it happens that Rat Man’s father had secured his future by giving up his first love, who came from a family of only modest means, to marry Rat Man’s mother whose family were wealthy, with ‘connections’. The dream could equally reflect the child’s (Rat Man’s) Oedipal phantasy: ‘we are both sufferers’ referring to the boy’s identification and longing for his mother as well as her sadness (and his) at her being married for her money rather than for herself; but she chooses him (rather than his father) and carries him away, and his poverty and illness drop away as he basks in the ‘gorgeous raiment’ of her wealth and love for him.

Freud’s counter-transference

- Rat Man recounted in the session of 12 Oct. how when he got home he chanced to meet his servant-girl who was ‘neither young nor pretty but had been showing him attention for some

time past ... he suddenly gave her a kiss and then attacked her. Though *she no doubt made only a show of resistance*, he came to his senses and fled to his room' (*ibid.*, p. 261, my italics). Freud's commented assumption that the girl 'made only a show of resistance' shows a considerable degree of hostility towards women on Freud's part, and the fact that it was Rat Man's ambivalent feelings towards his mother that Freud avoided analysing, suggests that this avoidance might well be a defence against Freud's own unconscious anger towards his own mother.

- At the end of the above session Rat Man mentions 'two considerations' that held him back from committing suicide. The first was the thought of his mother finding his bleeding remains, but the second, Freud noted, 'I [Freud] have curiously enough forgotten'. He then recollected Rat Man's memories in his fourth year of his sister Camilla's death, but it was not until the next session (14 Oct.) that he remembers the second consideration that he had forgotten, that 'once when he [Rat Man] was very young and he and his sister were talking about death, she said: "On my soul, if you die I shall kill myself" ... *They were forgotten owing to complexes of my own*' (*ibid.*, p. 264, my italics).

Freud's 'complexes of my own', as will be seen later, must have referred to his own childhood when his brother Julius died when Freud was 19 months old. In a letter to Fliess (Freud–Fliess letters, 3 October 1897) Freud commented that Julius's death 'left the germ of [self-] reproaches in me'. In addition, it is likely that following Camilla's death Rat Man feared the loss of his sister Rosalie nearest to Camilla in age, and the fact that his mother had the same name Rosa could well have added to the childhood fear of losing their mothers for both Rat Man and Freud, with the associated activation of ambivalence towards their mothers.

- In the session of 2 Jan. Freud notes having previously mentioned to Rat Man in connection with women's 'genital hairs' that 'it was a pity that women nowadays gave no care to them and speak of them as unlovely' (Freud, 1909b, p. 311). This curious, indeed striking, remark indicates some degree of identification of Freud with Rat Man in their seeming alignment together in discussing 'women', and again indicates a measure of ambivalence towards women.
- In the session of Nov. 18 (*ibid.*, p. 280) Freud was much taken aback when Rat Man, referring to the time of the manoeuvres and the rat episode, stated that Captain Nemecek had 'mentioned the name of a Gisela Fluss (!!!)'. The exclamation marks are Freud's own in the original notes – Gisela Fluss was the name of Freud's own adolescent love! Yet later

in the original record (*ibid.*, p. 288) Freud corrects this, ‘It was another officer who mentioned the name Gisela; Nemeček had mentioned the name Hertz’ (a footnote in the original record notes that ‘Hertz’ – a pseudonym – was a public figure in Austria; Nemeček had apparently said that the torture ought to be applied to ‘some members of Parliament’). The real name of the public figure mentioned by Nemeček was in fact Adler, which happened to be Gisela's own surname – no wonder Rat Man was in a state of panic – but for Freud, too, events must have seemed uncomfortably close to home since this same public figure Dr Adler was none other than the previous tenant of Freud’s apartment in Vienna (Mahony, 1986, p. 14). Did Rat Man mention ‘Gisela Fluss’ at all, or was ‘Gisela Fluss!!!’ Freud’s own association to Rat Man’s Gisela?

- An indirect indication of Freud’s counter-transference appeared in the 8 Dec. session where Freud commented that ‘The theme of the rats has lacked any element directed towards his mother, evidently because there is very strong resistance in relation to her’; the word resistance carries a footnote (Freud, 1909b, p. 293), that ‘The reading of the MS. is doubtful at this point’, perhaps the indistinct script is an indication of Freud’s own resistance.

Transference and the basic fault

In the session of 21 Nov. Freud interpreted to Rat Man that in using his ‘protective formula’, *Glejisamen*, made up of letters from Gisela’s name followed by ‘Samen’ (= semen), he ‘had masturbated with her image’. Freud added that he (Rat Man) was convinced by this. The next day ‘he came in a state of deep depression’ and there followed a period (until 11 Dec.) of transference material involving not only Freud, but Freud’s wife and daughter (Anna – then 12 years old) too.

Much of this material was difficult for Rat Man as well as deeply insulting to Freud. It seems clear from the original record (although not commented on by Freud), that it was precipitated by Freud’s masturbatory interpretation of the formula *Glejisamen*. This would have confirmed Rat Man’s father transference to Freud, the sense of being found out in masturbation by his father.

At the end of the 22 Nov. session Rat Man, with difficulty, revealed that the transference concerned Freud’s daughter. At this point Freud noted that ‘After a struggle and assertions by him that my undertaking *to show that all the material concerned only himself looked like anxiety on my [Freud’s] part*, he surrendered the first of his ideas’ (*ibid.*, p. 281, my italics). This is the first indication of the way Rat Man, in the following ‘transference sessions’, uncannily seems to perceive Freud’s own sensitive points, at this moment surely referring to

his perception of Freud's own defensive counter-transference.

This situation is reminiscent of Balint's (1968) *Basic Fault* – when an analysis begins to approach the area of the 'basic fault', the patient begins to show 'an uncanny talent ... to "understand" the analyst's motives and to "interpret" his behaviour ... The analyst experiences this phenomenon as if the patient could see inside him ... The things thus found out are always highly personal ...' (Balint, 1968, p. 19). In this case, the material revealed in these 'transference sessions' is likely to be as revealing about Freud as about Rat Man.

A number of the key points in this transference material are listed below:

- **Freud's daughter:**

- ◇ 'phantasies of being unfaithful to Gisa with [Freud's] daughter and punishment for this' (Freud, 1909b, p. 282).
- ◇ '...a dirty fellow ... and a woman was practising "minette" [fellatio] with him. Again my daughter!' (*ibid.*, p. 283);
- ◇ 'He was lying on his back on a girl (my daughter) and copulating with her by means of the stool hanging from his anus' (*ibid.*, p. 287);
- ◇ 'Another horrible idea – of ordering me to bring my daughter into the room, so that he could lick her, saying "bring in the *Miessnick*" [a Jewish term meaning 'ugly creature'] (*ibid.*, p. 284).

- **Freud's mother:**

- ◇ 'Cheerful, but became depressed when I brought him back to the subject. A fresh transference:– My [Freud's] mother was dead' (*ibid.*, p. 283);
- ◇ 'Next session was filled with the most frightful transferences ... My mother was standing in despair while all her children were being hanged' (*ibid.*, p. 284);
- ◇ 'A number of children were lying on the ground, and he went up to each of them and did something into their mouths ... [one] had brown marks round his mouth ... A change followed: it was I, and I was doing it to my mother' (*ibid.*, p. 286).

- **Freud's wife**

- ◇ 'One of his transferences was straight out that Frau Prof. F. should lick his arse' (*ibid.*, p. 293).

Freud's wife appeared less often in the transference material than his mother and daughter, but

on one occasion appeared with both:

- ◇ ‘... a transference phantasy. Between two women – my wife and my mother – a herring was stretched, extending from the anus of one to that of the other. A girl cut it in two ... my twelve-year-old daughter’ (*ibid.*, p. 307).

FREUD’S PSYCHOBIOGRAPHY

Stolorow and Atwood (1979) provide a fascinating insight into the metapsychologies of Freud, Jung, Rank and Reich by analysing their psychobiographies. In the case of Freud they argue that:

the positive, ambivalence-free quality of Freud’s conscious attitudes toward his mother was the product of a defensive idealization process that served to protect his image of their relationship from invasion by negative affects ... that this defensive idealization functioned ultimately to avert the dreaded emergence of murderous hostility toward her and to ward off the catastrophic possibility of object loss (Stolorow and Atwood, 1979, p. 49).

They pinpoint two events as crucial in the development of Freud’s personality: the birth of his brother Julius when he was 11 months old and Julius’s death eight months later; and the birth of his sister Anna when he was 2½.

As Stolorow and Atwood point out, Freud described the first event in a letter to Fliess (Freud–Fliess letters, 3 October 1897): ‘I greeted my one-year-younger brother with adverse wishes and genuine childhood jealousy ... his death left the germ of [self-] reproaches in me’. And in *New Introductory Lectures* (Freud, 1933), discussing the ending of a girl’s attachment to her mother, ‘the attachment to the mother ends in hate ... The reproach against the mother which goes back furthest is that she gave the child too little milk ... The next accusation ... flares up when the next baby appears in the nursery ... and it is a remarkable fact that a child, even with an age difference of only eleven months, is not too young to take notice of what is happening ... it casts a jealous hatred upon the new baby and develops a grievance against the faithless mother’ (pp. 121–3). Although speaking of a little girl, this could equally be transposed directly to Freud himself, even down to the exact age difference of 11 months between he and his brother Julius.

The birth of his sister Anna came soon after Freud’s nurse was removed from his life

(she was sacked for stealing during his mother's confinement), and the unexplained loss of her and the appearance of another rival on the scene must have been a considerable trauma for the 2½-year-old Freud.

Adding to Stolorow and Atwood's analysis we note that Freud was never close to his sister Anna; when her mother bought a piano for her Sigmund complained of the noise and it was got rid of; when Anna married Sigmund's wife's brother (Eli) he did not attend the wedding, and relations remained strained into adult life. A large part of his animosity towards Anna was probably displaced from his mother in order to maintain his idealisation of her.

On the other hand Freud became extremely close to his youngest daughter also named Anna, forming a strong polarity between his animosity for one and his great affection for the other. Indeed it is likely that his affection for his daughter Anna was enhanced as a defence against his hostility towards Anna his sister and, through her, towards his mother.

Stolorow and Atwood describe the central conflict in Freud's life as that between 'an intense possessive need for his mother's love, and an equally intense, magically potent hatred' (Stolorow and Atwood, 1979, p. 52).

In relation to Rat Man we might suggest that Freud found himself dealing with material uncomfortably close to home, and from the extracts above, particularly those from the 'transference sessions', he found himself inexorably drawn into the plot of Rat Man's neurosis with its resonances to his own mother (and daughter) complexes, making it even more difficult to face and analyse Rat Man's mother complex.

Another example of the way Freud must have felt 'drawn in' came in the 25 Nov. session when Rat Man mentioned that his sister Olga 'had once remarked that Alex [Freud's brother] would be the right husband for Gisa' (Freud, 1909b, p. 285), in effect drawing Freud further into Rat Man's own family.

The family members of both Freud and Rat Man (real name Ernst Lanzer) are shown below:

<i>Rat Man's family</i>	<i>Age difference (yrs)</i>	<i>Freud's family</i>	<i>Age difference (yrs)</i>
sister Hedwig	+8		
sister Camilla (died when RM 3½)	+6	(half-brother Emmanuel)	+23
sister Rosalie	+4	(half-brother Philip)	+20
Rat Man (Ernst Lanzer)		Sigmund Freud	
brother Robert	-1½	brother Julius	-1

sister Olga	-2½	sister Anna	-2½
sister Gertrud	-8	sister Rosa	-4
		sister Marie	-5
		sister Dolfi	-6
		sister Paula	-7
		brother Alexander	-10
cousin Gisella Adler (RM's 'lady')		'adolescent love' Gisela Fluss	
mother Rosalie		youngest daughter Anna	
father Heinrich		mother Amalia	
		father Jakob	

There are remarkable similarities between the two family situations: both families were dominated by sisters (Rat Man's 5 sisters and 1 brother, Freud's 5 sisters and 2 brothers); both lost a sibling in their early life (Rat Man his sister Camilla when he was 4, Freud his brother Julius when Freud was 19 months old); Rat Man's 4-yrs-older sister Rosalie (and his mother) had the same name as Rosa, Freud's 4-yrs-younger sister (we don't know how close or not Freud was to that sister); and Rat Man's 'lady' had the same name, Gisela, as Freud's adolescent love. In addition, and significantly, there is a strong polarity between Rat Man's almost incestuous relation to his 2½-yrs-younger sister Olga, and Freud's animosity to *his* 2½-yrs-younger sister Anna.

It seems likely that Rat Man's ambivalence to women and particularly towards his mother must have impacted strongly on Freud's own ambivalence. The added transference material in which Freud's daughter Anna figured so strongly is also likely to have threatened Freud's whole defensive structure invested in his father-daughter relationship, a defence against his unconscious hostility to his sister Anna and through her to his mother. Finally, the pre-Oedipal feelings of responsibility and guilt for the deaths of their respective siblings provided another factor, all adding to a situation in which for Freud it seems to have been safer to focus on the relatively straightforward father complex.

FINAL COMMENTS

The Oedipus complex

The recognition of an Oedipal situation emerged for Freud during his self-analysis. In a letter to Fliess in 1897 (Freud-Fliess letters, 15 October): 'A single idea of general value dawned on

me. I have found, in my own case too, being in love with my mother and jealous of my father, and I now consider it a universal event in early childhood... we can understand the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex* [which] ... seizes on a compulsion which everyone recognises because he senses its existence within himself’.

Although the importance of an early Oedipal situation was recognised, the idea of a ‘complex’ did not become formulated until 1908 onwards, influenced by Jung. In *The Sexual Theories of Children* (Freud, 1908, p. 214) the term ‘nuclear complex’ appeared for the first time, as well as in a letter to Jung (Freud–Jung letters [1909] 160F, p. 260), and in a footnote in the published Rat Man case (Freud, 1909a, p. 208n).

It is clear in these early references that the ‘nuclear complex’ as used by Freud at that time was a rather general term and not yet regarded as a complex *necessarily* involving all three components – mother, father and child. In Rat Man (*ibid.*), it ‘comprises the child’s earliest impulses, alike tender and hostile, towards its parents and brothers and sisters, after its curiosity has been awakened – usually by the arrival of a new baby brother or sister’. But in the case itself, Freud was concerned with only one of its aspects, the ‘father complex’. Similarly in his other ‘paradigm’ cases – for example in ‘Dora’ (Freud, 1905) the key figures were Dora, her father and Herr K, but not Dora’s mother.

However, the Rat Man case seems to have been a point of transition. In the same footnote mentioned above, Freud notes that ‘his sexual desires for his mother and sister and his sister’s premature death were linked up with the young hero’s chastisement at his father’s hand’, but that the phantasies could not be unravelled ‘thread by thread’ because ‘The patient recovered’, and ‘I am not to be blamed, therefore, for this gap in the analysis’.

In *Five Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (Freud, 1910a), a work which Freud was writing around the same time as he was preparing the Rat Man case for publication, the fourth lecture contains a summary of the ‘nuclear complex’ in terms far closer to a triadic Oedipus complex: ‘As a rule a father prefers his daughter and a mother her son; the child reacts to this by wishing, if he is a son, to take his father’s place, and, if she is a daughter, her mother’s. The feelings which are aroused ... are not only positive ... but also ...negative ... The complex ... is doomed to early repression’ (*ibid.*, p. 47). Even here there is still ambivalence in projecting the motive force onto the parents, rather than recognising the equal role of the child’s attraction to the parent. Nevertheless, the Oedipus complex seems almost complete and it was finally given its name in 1910 (Freud, 1910b, p. 171), only a few months after publishing Rat Man

Given this short time gap it is likely that Freud’s awareness of Rat Man’s Oedipus complex, and its resonances to his own, although confined to a footnote in the published case

study, might have been of great importance in crystallising his ideas on the nature of the complex as triangular, rather than as hitherto focusing on its bipolar aspects.

Interpretation

The question of Interpretation is central to psychoanalysis; what to interpret and what kinds of interpretation are therapeutic and why. But largely ignored is where does the interpretation come from? What causes an analyst to *see* a particular interpretation, or *choose* one interpretation out of perhaps several possibilities? Is an analyst neutral in his functioning and choice? Few would nowadays claim that the ‘fully-analysed analyst’ exists, rather that self-reflection and self-analysis are lifelong processes; in which case the analyst’s own psychology and psychopathology has to be a working factor in his or her approach, and this seems to have been the case for Freud in his treatment of the Rat Man case.

Rather than seeing this as in any sense a failure or criticism of Freud, we would choose to see in it an expression of his humanity, part of the roots of his creativity and lifelong investigation.

In *New Introductory Lectures* (Freud, 1933) Freud noted that ‘In self-analyses...[O]ne is too easily satisfied with a part-explanation, behind which resistance can easily keep back something which may perhaps be more important’. Freud’s own analysis was of course a self-analysis, and while his comment here could be used to refer to his difficulties in facing parts of his own past history, namely his mother complex, they also show his awareness of multiple levels of interpretation.

Rats

That the core problem was Rat Man’s Oedipal situation, rather than the rat episode which gave its name to the case study, is supported by Rat Man himself in Freud’s original notes: ‘More rat-stories; but as he [Rat Man] admitted in the end, he had only collected them in order to evade the transference phantasies...’ (Freud, 1909b, p. 289).

Similarly, Rat Man’s relatives seem not to have been aware of rats at all, and regarded the treatment as mainly of help in overcoming Ernst’s relational problems with women and with work (personal communication, Anthony Stadlen, Regent’s College, London, 1997); so it is fitting that we end this paper using his real name, Ernst Lanzer, the person who has provided much food for thought to analysts and Freud scholars over the last 88 years.

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