

The Case of the Rat Man

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On Freud's Couch



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Horror at Pleasure of His Own of which He Himself is Not Aware: The Case of the Rat Man

Rolf Künstlicher

On the first of October 1907, the 29-year-old Bachelor of Law, Ernst Lanzer, later known as the Rat Man, walked into Sigmund Freud's consulting room. At that moment a collaboration began that was to prove extremely productive for the development of psychoanalytical theory.¹

Of Freud's case histories, the Rat Man is considered to be the one that gives us the best picture of a psychoanalytical treatment process, and it is unique insofar as it is the only case for

which Freud's own working notes have been preserved. Freud was otherwise very careful to burn his private notes. The Swedish edition, as a complement to the *Standard Edition*, gives us a chance to study both his clinical reflections and his editing, providing opportunities to investigate his technique, get a glimpse of what he places emphasis on, and make educated guesses as to what he unconsciously leaves out. The fact that Freud painstakingly destroyed his private papers tells us something about his wish to safeguard his integrity; it is probably against his will that we have access to these working notes. We should, therefore, approach them with particular respect as we peek uninvited into his private life.

At the beginning of the 1900s, psychoanalysis was still an untested form of

therapy; this was the reason Freud had to produce convincing case histories for the outside world. It could be said that the Rat Man² turned up at an opportune moment, and Freud soon realized that the man was suffering from obsessional neurosis. The Rat Man became the first obsessional neurotic to be described in detail; at the same time Freud got the opportunity to document the therapeutic power of psychoanalysis. Because the Rat Man was, as Freud wrote, “completely restored,” Freud was able to gain increased credibility for his theory in the outside world. These ambitions of his would naturally leave their mark on the analysis of the Rat Man.

The striking differences between the edited case history that was made public and the working notes have given rise to an extensive

secondary literature on the subject. For my own part, I have found of particular interest the interplay between Freud, the analyst, and his patient, or more precisely what emerges as their more or less unconscious attitudes to each other. This is what psychoanalysts call the patient's transference and the analyst's countertransference. Since space is limited, I will reproduce the case history only briefly and place the chief emphasis on those theoretical views of Freud's that are of interest from my perspective.

The psychoanalytical concepts, transference and counter-transference, describe the unconscious motives and conflicts that shape and direct the interplay between analyst and patient. These motivating forces—those which have not been reported and which may provide

the modern reader with new and sometimes surprising ideas—are what interest me. For example, an invisible factor of this type is Freud’s theory of the mechanisms involved in the origin of obsessive neurosis, which by this time he had already hammered out and which had a great influence on his interpretations. Another important factor was Freud’s ambition to launch the theory of psychoanalysis and convincingly demonstrate its effect, something which was a guiding principle in his work at this time.

But reading the case history from the perspective of the concepts of transference and counter-transference is just as anachronistic as studying surgery from the beginning of the century and saying that they should have operated with laser technique instead. Certainly

the concept of transference was already a part of Freud's theoretical model where the patient's repetition of infantile conflicts is described, but he had not yet developed the full clinical import of this concept. Several years passed before he described how the patient's unconscious conflicts are reflected in relation to the analyst (Freud 1912b, 1915). Even if at this time Freud had begun to realize that the analyst represented persons from the patient's childhood, he did not realize that the hidden tidings in the symptoms also carried messages aimed directly at the analyst.

Likewise Freud was aware of the importance of the psychoanalyst's blind spots as an obstacle to the work of analysis, but countertransference did not yet exist as an independent clinical concept. My conviction, nevertheless, is that

today we can learn something from Freud's work by using concepts in our analysis created after Freud's time. This is consequently not a criticism of Freud as a theoretician and clinician but rather an effort to point out the complications in his analytical work that contain the seeds of the future development of his theory.

Freud (1909b) describes the start of the first consultation:³

A youngish man of university education introduced himself to me with the statement that he had suffered from obsessions ever since his childhood, but with particular intensity for the last four years. The chief features of his disorder were *fears* that something might happen to two people of whom he was very fond—his father and a lady whom he admired. Besides this he was aware of *compulsive impulses*—such as an impulse, for instance,

to cut his throat with a razor; and further he produced *prohibitions*, sometimes in connection with quite unimportant things. He had wasted years, he told me, in fighting against these ideas of his, and in this way had lost much ground in the course of his life. [p. 158]

After this the Rat Man reports on his sex life, which he considers poor and irregular. He thinks prostitutes are disgusting. When Freud wonders “what it was that made him lay such stress upon telling me about his sexual life, he replied that that was what he knew about my theories.” Here Freud ends his report of the interview, but we can read the following addendum in his working notes: “He gave me the impression of being a clear-headed and shrewd person. After I had told him my terms, he said he must consult his mother. The next day he came back and accepted them” (1909b, p. 255).

Freud begins the first session by informing him of the fundamental rule for the work of the psychoanalysis: “The next day I made him pledge himself to submit to the one and only condition of the treatment—namely, to say everything that came into his head, even if it was *unpleasant* to him, or seemed *unimportant* or *irrelevant* or *senseless*” (159). Freud has set the tone, and the Rat Man responds with a story about two male friends. Of the first, “he had an extraordinarily high opinion. He used always to go to him when he was tormented by some criminal impulse, and ask him whether he despised him as a criminal. His friend used then to give him moral support by assuring him that he was a man of irreproachable conduct.”

The other was a student, a friend four or five years his senior, who had taken a liking to him

and raised his self-esteem so that he felt like a genius. Ernst (“The Rat Man” is Freud’s designation for his patient, while I use Lanzer’s first name when I reproduce his own memories) did not realize until later that the student had only taken him up in order to gain admission to his house and become the family tutor, and because he was interested in one of Ernst’s sisters. When he had gotten what he was after, he treated Ernst like an idiot, and the latter felt exploited and humiliated.

We can think of this beginning as a dialogue where Freud’s message is interpreted as being inconsistent. The Rat Man is free to express whatever thought comes into his head but at same time he has to submit to the fundamental rule. The response is not long in coming. Like the one friend, Freud is friendly and supportive,

but also intrusive and hortative, a manipulator and seducer. Might it be that he wants to exploit the Rat Man? Freud naturally enough did not interpret the Rat Man's comments this way as he did not listen to them with the idea that they contained information about how the patient unconsciously perceived him.

Next the Rat Man continues, “without any apparent transition,” to recount in detail his sexual adventures as a little boy, especially with young governesses. He describes himself as very precocious, first with Fräulein Rudolf, who allowed him to creep under her nightgown and play with her genitals. Somewhat later it was a Fräulein Paula, also “young and good-looking. She had abscesses on her buttocks which she was in the habit of pressing out every night. I used to wait eagerly for that moment.” When he

had gotten this far in the narrative he seems to have been struck by fear of his hubris, for he now recalls how when Fräulein Paula and some of her girl friends were sitting talking, they had compared him with his brother, who was one-and-a-half years younger, saying contemptuously that that little one could do it, but Ernst was “too clumsy, he would be sure to miss it.” Ernst felt that he did not pass muster, that he was “inferior in some way.” Obviously here is a problem for the Rat Man that touches on his relation to women, the mother, something which Freud does not comment on, and the Rat Man continues:

When I was six years old I already suffered from erections, and I know that once I went to my mother to complain about them. I know too that in doing so I had some misgivings to get over (...) and at that time I used have a morbid idea that *my parents*

knew my thoughts; I explained this to myself by supposing that I had spoken them out loud, without having heard myself do it.
I look on this as the beginning of my illness. [1909b, p. 162]

Freud regards this so-called delusion as Ernst's perception of his own unconscious, something he is not capable of controlling and which threatens his integrity. Unconscious, forbidden fantasies are threatening for Ernst, exerting pressure on him, for even if he does not understand them, he suspects that the forbidden thoughts are there and that others can see their result in him: his constant erection.

In connection with this train of thought, Ernst gets into the subject of punishment. He began to have an irresistible urge to see girls naked but the very thought of it gave him a distressing feeling that his father might die. Here

Freud tells us that he has found out that the Rat Man's father had been dead for many years.

This is only a fraction of the rich material offered by the Rat Man during this first session. One can wonder what he wanted Freud to get out of this story of his precocious sexual activity, told so freely and openly. Freud also writes the following in his working notes:

I return to Fräulein Robert (whose real name was "Rudolf"), wishing to find out her first name, but he does not know it. Isn't he surprised over having forgotten her first name which, of course, could be used exclusively for a woman, and only remembering her surname? He is not surprised, but after his introduction and the compromise "Robert," I realize that he is a homosexual. [Hawelka 1974, p. 5]

The last note says, "His father is dead. (When did he die?)" This passage is not given in the

case history. Freud did not get this information until the subsequent session, but he edited the story so that it would flow better.

Freud writes that the Rat Man begins the second session by choosing to tell about “the experience which was the immediate cause” of his coming to Freud. But in a parenthesis further along we learn that the Rat Man had really begun by pointing out that there was a great deal in himself that he would have to overcome in order to relate these experiences. Freud answers by explaining the concept of resistance to him. His pedagogical instructions strengthen the picture of a hortative, intrusive analyst more eager to get information than to listen to the Rat Man’s news.

It was difficult for the Rat Man to talk about an event that had occurred a few months earlier when, as a reserve officer, he had taken part in military maneuvers. There he had heard how a certain Captain Nemeček facetiously described a specially horrible punishment used in the Orient. This occurred during a halt during which the Rat Man had fallen into conversation with some officers, among whom was this captain. Shortly before this, the Rat Man had lost his pince-nez but did not want to delay the start, and since he wanted to make a good impression on the officers he sent for another pair from Vienna. The Rat Man relates the story:

“I sat between two officers, one of whom, a captain with a Czech name, was to be of no small importance to me. I had a kind of dread of him, *for he was obviously fond of cruelty*. ...the captain told me had had read

of a specially horrible punishment used in the East ...”

Here the patient broke off, got up from the sofa, and begged me to spare him the recital of the details. I assured him that I myself had no taste whatever for cruelty, and certainly had no desire to torment him, but that naturally I could not grant him something which was beyond my power. He might just as well ask me to give him the moon. The overcoming of resistances was a law of the treatment, and on no consideration could it be dispensed with. (I had explained the idea of “resistance” to him at the beginning of the hour, when he told me there was much in himself which he would have to overcome if he was to relate this experience of his.) I went on to say that I would do all I could, nevertheless, to guess the full meaning of any hints he gave me. Was he perhaps thinking of impalement? “No, not that; ... the criminal was tied up ...”—he expressed himself so indistinctly that I could not immediately guess in what position—“... a pot was turned upside down on his

buttocks ... some *rats* were put into it ... and they ...”—he had again got up, and was showing every sign of horror and resistance—“...*bored their way in...*”—Into his anus, I helped him out. [1909b, p. 166]

Freud notices that the Rat Man has a special expression on his face, which Freud

interpret[s] as one of *horror at pleasure of his own of which he himself was unaware*. He proceeded with the greatest difficulty. “At that moment there flashed through my mind the idea *that this was happening to a person who was very dear to me.*” (...) After a little prompting I learnt that the person to whom this “idea” of his related was the lady whom he admired. He broke off the story to assure me that these thoughts were entirely foreign and repugnant to him.... Simultaneously with the idea there always appeared a “sanction,” that is to say, the defensive measure he was obliged to adopt in order to prevent the phantasy from being fulfilled. [p. 168]

The Rat Man “behaved as though he were daezed and bewildered,” addressing Freud as “Herr Captain.” Freud’s explanation of this was that he, at the beginning of the session, had told the Rat Man that he had no taste for cruelty. We see how an intricate interplay is beginning to prevail between the two parties. Freud gives himself away by his assurance that he did not have the least tendency toward cruelty—he felt a need to defend himself. He obviously did not realize the extent of the Rat Man’s transference reaction. It is Freud who forces out the confession and that is why he is perceived as cruel. Perhaps Freud wanted to draw attention to a dissociation from the captain to make it easier for the Rat Man to continue his narrative. Or did Freud want to give an indirect interpretation of

the Rat Man's image of him? Is it possible that Freud had guilt feelings over his own sadism?

The Rat Man devotes the rest of the next session to the confusing story of the lost pince-nez. Freud does not understand it and has to ask him to tell it three times. Did the Rat Man want Freud to lose his composure in order to get control of him? 'That evening the same captain had handed him a packet that had arrived by the post and had said: 'Lieutenant A. has paid the charges for you. You must pay him back'' (1909b, p. 168).

At that instant, however, a "sanction" had taken place in his mind, namely, that "*he was not to pay back the money* or it would happen (that is, the phantasy about the rats would come true as regards his father and the lady)."

Whereupon there followed a command that he must pay back the money and then he goes into a seemingly endless series of arguments for and against. He devotes the following session, too, to all the ins and outs of if and how he should pay. All the time he knows, which Freud does not, that it is the postmistress in the village who has laid out the money. There is something humiliating, both in having lost the pince-nez and his compulsive thoughts in relation to the captain, which reminds him of his submission and self-castration. The kind postmistress is remarkably absent from this whole performance. For a long time she continues to be without money and without a place in the story since the struggle between the men is more highly charged. Similarly, Freud brings in the father as the object of the Rat Man's torture, despite the

fact that it was only the lady who turned up in his fantasy. The story of the lost pince-nez is confusing and hard to grasp, taking up a lot of time during the analysis. Because of his narrative style and his withholding of important information, the Rat Man ignores the fundamental rule and fools Freud. Defiance of the oppressor, the captain?

Freud seems to sense the conflict between his own activity and the Rat Man's, and therefore begins the fourth session by pointing out to the reader that "the true technique of psychoanalysis requires the physician to suppress his curiosity and leaves the patient complete freedom in choosing the order in which topics shall succeed each other during the treatment. At the fourth session, accordingly, I received the patient with the question: 'And how

do you intend to proceed today?” (1909b, p. 174). And the Rat Man begins by telling at great length the story of his father’s last illness and death. He “misunderstood” the information from the doctor and went to bed at half-past eleven in the belief that his father was in no immediate danger. When he woke up at one o’clock he heard that his father had died. He had reproached himself for not having been present at his death. For a long time afterwards he had not realized the fact of his father’s death. When there was a knock on the door he often thought, “Now Father is coming.” Although he knew that his father was dead, he still expected to see a ghostly apparition, and he thought of this as something he very greatly desired. It is not unusual for obsessional neurotics to have two irreconcilable attitudes to the same phenomena.

The Rat Man knows that his father is dead in reality, but since his unconscious wish in the psychic reality tells him that his father is still alive, he acts accordingly. Freud would continue to develop the concept of the split of the ego for the rest of his life (Freud 1927b, 1938a).

The Rat Man continues his report of how his guilt became conscious:

It had not been until eighteen months later that the recollection of his neglect had recurred to him and begun to torment him terribly, so that he had come to treat himself as a criminal. The occasion of this happening had been the death of an aunt by marriage.... He told me that the only thing that had kept him going at that time had been the consolation given him by his friend, who had always brushed his self-reproaches aside on the ground that they were grossly exaggerated. Hearing this, I took the opportunity of giving him a first glance at the underlying principles of

psychoanalytic therapy. When there is a *mésalliance*, I began, between an affect and its ideational content (in this instance between the intensity of the self-reproach and the occasion for it) ... the affect is ... exaggerated ...the self-reproach is false. On the contrary, the physician says: “No. The affect is justified. The sense of guilt is not in itself open to further criticism. But it belongs to some other content, which is unknown (*unconscious*), and which requires to be looked for.” [1909b, p. 175]

Thus Freud concludes the session with an interpretation that hints without explicitly stating that the sense of guilt has its origin in an unconscious death wish against his father, the same feeling that was aroused when little Ernst wanted to see naked little girls. The Rat Man defends himself: How could he accept an accusation from his conscience since he had never committed any crime against his father?

During the succeeding sessions the struggle between Freud's interpretation and the Rat Man's doubts about this construction continues. Primarily through pedagogical explanations and metaphors, Freud tries to convince him of the psychological differences between the unconscious and the conscious. But Freud knows that it will not be satisfactory if he is the one who puts insights into words. The Rat Man must discover for himself what is hidden within himself.

Somewhat later The Rat Man says that "he must tell [of] an event in his childhood." From the age of 7 he had a fear that his parents guessed his thoughts, and this fear had persisted all through his life. When he was 12 years old he had been in love with a little girl, the sister of a friend of his. He got the idea that she would be

kind to him if some misfortune were to befall him, for example, his father's death. The Rat Man refuses to see the connections in these trains of thought but Freud is extremely obstinate. Even if the Rat Man admits that the idea had occurred to him that if his father died he might be wealthy enough to marry his "fine lady," once he had had this thought, he had wished that his father would not leave him anything at all. After his father's death the thought recurred. (Actually the Rat Man let his mother take charge of his inheritance, but Freud does not comment on this.) The Rat Man cannot understand his thoughts since he has never wished his father's death, only feared it. Freud now presents the theory that the anxiety corresponds to a wish that is now repressed, that is to say, a death wish directed against his father.

But the Rat Man still does not want to believe this, since he “loved his father more than anyone else in the world.”

The Rat Man had been his father’s best friend and his father had been his. Of course, he loved his “lady” very much but not sensually as he had in his childhood. His sensual impulses had been much stronger in childhood than during puberty. Freud thinks that his hostility to his father is clearly in the category of sensual desire. His father had interfered with his sexual desires. “It was not until he was once more seized with intense erotic desires that his hostility reappeared again owing to the revival of the old situation,” that is, when as an adult he felt sexual desire he re-experienced the same fear of his father that he had had as a child. Freud is now so convinced of this that he

interprets every thought and idea that does not fit into his picture as a resistance on the part of the Rat Man, and he therefore breaks off a train of thought concerning the Rat Man's ambivalence toward women and his sexuality.

Freud pushes his theory of a death wish against the father. This is easy to go along with because of the way the basic data are presented. But Freud's theory of the father complex seems to blind him to other aspects of the material, besides which, as we will see, Freud edits his notes so that they support his premise. It is as if Sigmund Freud assumes that his patient has an aversion to his theories, which is why he has to try to prove them. Consequently he ends up in a power struggle with the Rat Man; this is just what the latter expects and probably wishes

since it is in line with his obsessive neurotic behavior.

During the seventh (and last) of the sessions, where we have an exhaustive report from Freud, the Rat Man chooses to continue his struggle. He denies that Freud's interpretations are correct, but according to Freud that only supports his interpretation. According to his theory, denial is the same as unconsciously speaking for what one does not want to acknowledge, and so the Rat Man can scarcely object any longer; whatever he does is a confirmation of the theory and Freud reminds him that "He must never lose sight of the fact that a treatment like ours proceeded to the accompaniment of a *constant resistance*; I should be repeatedly reminding him of this fact" (1909b, p. 184). The Rat Man continues to talk about his jealousy and how his

vindictiveness had driven him into coming to blows with his younger brother (he tried to injure his eye), asking self-reproachfully how he could do such a thing. Freud says, “I took the opportunity of urging my case.” Freud stubbornly maintains that he can not exclude the possibility that something similar has happened vis-á-vis his father. The Rat Man objects that he can relate other vindictive actions as well, toward the lady he admired so much. During the ensuing conversation Freud explains that these reprehensible impulses originated from his childhood years, but the Rat Man doubts that all his evil impulses have originated from there. Freud “promise [s] to prove it to him in the course of the treatment.” The glove is in the ring.

Freud concludes this way: “This is as much of the present case history as I am able to report in a detailed and consecutive manner. It coincides roughly with the expository portion of the treatment; this lasted in all for more than eleven months”⁴ (1909b, p. 186).

“Amazing, but He Masturbated at that Point”

For Freud, infantile sexuality with its accompanying fear of his father’s punishment is the principal element in the Rat Man’s unconscious conflicts. Freud therefore focuses exclusively on the father’s role as the cause of the disturbance in Little Ernst’s sexual desires. That being so, the result is that the boy, and later the adult, unconsciously wishes to get his father out of the way. These forbidden thoughts, which he does not want to acknowledge, create anxiety and terror. As the case history proceeds, Freud

expands his theoretical reasoning, making use of the clinical material as an illustration and evidence of the significance of the father complex. This complex will become the foundation stone in Freud's theoretical model, serving as a base both for his understanding of the Rat Man's obsessional neurosis and the organization of his material, something which thereby also becomes a guiding principle in his interpretation method. The intimate and divided relation to his mother and the "lady" ("he can relate other vindictive actions as well, towards the lady") plays the part of an extra on Freud's stage.

By examining the differences between the edited version and Freud's working notes, we can come closer to understanding what he bases his interpretations on. Let us look at an example

from the working notes. On October 11, 1907, he writes: “Resistance, because I requested him yesterday to bring a photograph of the lady with him—i.e. to give up his reticence about her. Conflict as to whether he should abandon the treatment or surrender his secrets” (1909b, p. 260). Here we get an idea of how importunate and involved Freud was, something I shall return to.

The next day the Rat Man begins cheerfully to tell of how he kissed the servant girl but had come to his senses and fled into his room. Something nasty always spoiled his fine and happy moments. Afterwards he gets into the subject of masturbation. He began to masturbate after his father death, when he was 21, because he had heard of it. Afterwards he was always very much ashamed. He “swore on his blessed

soul to give it up.” A few years later his lady’s grandmother died and he wanted to join her. On that occasion his mother exclaimed: “‘On my soul, you shall not go!’ The similarity of this oath struck him, and he reproached himself with bringing the salvation of his mother’s soul into danger. He told himself not to be more cowardly on his own account than on other people’s and, if he persisted in his intention of going to join the lady, to begin to masturbate again” (1909b, p. 262).

The Rat Man began to masturbate when his father died, and he resumes when he wants to defy his jealous mother. There is a connection between his mother and masturbation, just as we saw when he ran to her with a complaint about his erect penis, as if he were asking permission. Now masturbation has been transformed into a

means of separating himself from his dependence on his mother. He takes the liberty of gratifying himself without asking permission. Later on during the same session, the Rat Man says that once when he was reading Goethe's *Warheit und Dichtung* (*Truth and Poetry*—Freud transposes the words of the title), he masturbated at the same time as he was reading how Goethe “had freed himself in a burst of tenderness from the effects of a curse which a mistress had pronounced on whoever should kiss his lips.... and how he broke his bonds and kissed his love joyfully again and again.” And, Freud writes “he masturbated at this point, as he told me with amazement” (p. 262). Here, undeniably, one gets the impression that Freud is revealing something of his own inner reservations. It is obvious that Freud did not realize that the crucial thing about

masturbation, and what was so sexually exciting in the situation for the Rat Man, was the fact that he identified himself with Goethe and broke all his bonds to the jealous woman (his mother) who had pronounced the curse.

During the same session, the Rat Man speaks about his view of love and women, how he carefully makes a distinction between relations conducted only for the sake of intercourse and those that have to do with love. He avoids intercourse with a woman he dearly loves, and by so doing reveals the splitting in his image of women, the result of a train of thought that is repeated on several occasions. At this point Freud (1909b) concludes the session with the following entry in his notes: “I could not restrain myself here from constructing the material at our disposal into an event: how before the age of six

he had been in the habit of masturbating and how his father had forbidden it, using as a threat the phrase ‘it would be the death of you’ and perhaps also threatening to cut off his penis” (p. 263). Once again Freud breaks off a train of associations pertaining to the split in the Rat Man’s attitude to women and sexuality. What were Freud’s reasons for not being able to “restrain himself” from advancing his interpretations, causing him to ignore the Rat Man’s conflicts about women?

Not until 2 *weeks* later does the Rat Man introduce his father into the masturbation question, when he tells how he used to open the door to the hall, convinced that his father was standing outside. He was afraid of what his father would say about his masturbation habit if he was still alive. And after another two months,

December 27, he continues his masturbation theme:

He told me that during the Spring of 1903 he had been slack at his studies. He drew up a time-table, but only worked in the evening till twelve or one o'clock. He read for hours then but took in none of it. At this point he interpolated a recollection that in 1900 he had taken an oath never to masturbate again—the only one he remembers. At this time, however, he used ... to turn on a great deal of light in the hall and closet, take off all his clothes and look at himself in front of the looking-glass. He felt some concern as to whether his penis was too small, and during these performances he had some degree of erection, which reassured him. He also sometimes put a mirror between his legs. Moreover he used at that time to have an illusion that someone was knocking at the front door. He thought it was his father trying to get into the flat. [1909b, p. 302-303]

Observe that the time, between twelve and one, is the hour when his father died. Freud does not note this. Freud interprets the masturbation scene as defiance of the father, but the Rat Man admits only that it has a connection to a dim childhood memory. Let us now see how Freud edited the masturbation theme in the case history: “Our present patient’s behavior in the matter of masturbation was most remarkable. He did not practise it during puberty.... On the other hand, an impulsion towards masturbatory activities came over him in his twenty-first year, *shortly after his father’s death*” (1909b, p. 203).

Then follows the scene with Goethe and the jealous woman, and after this the masturbation scene at the mirror. The reconstruction that the father might have rebuked him when he was little did not come until afterwards. As we see,

Freud has changed the chronological order by basing his construction from October 12 on data that according to his working notes did not appear until October 27 and December 27 (See Mahony 1986, pp. 72-74). In that way Freud achieves his ends: to consider the father the predominant reason for the Rat Man's masturbation habit. Were there other motives? One of his aims might have been to give his presentation a better literary quality, at the same time making the construction more logical and comprehensible.

The significance of women, however, is conspicuous by its absence. Later psychoanalytical research directs our attention to the importance of masturbation in the separation of a boy from the early mother object. This, of course, can not have been applicable to Freud at

that time, but still Freud's editing gives the impression that both he and his patient had a common interest in avoiding the woman's (mother's) significance. As I see it, the Rat Man, by his masturbation habit, expresses the extent of his dependence on an early mother figure of whom he was deathly afraid. He needed his father to be able to separate himself from the dominating mother; the death of his father actualized this conflict, as a consequence of which masturbation came to represent his ability to gratify himself outside his mother's control.

Irreconcilable Ideas, which Dwell Side by Side Undisturbed

The Rat Man masturbates during the hour of the night when his father died and he himself had overslept, side by side with his opening the door to let his father in. Within this scene there

is an unconscious narrative in which masturbation stands for his longing for the man and his wish that his father will turn up as a shield against an unendurable inner conflict; at the same time the denial of his father's death becomes an important element. The account is also a confirmation of the splitting in the Rat Man we have noted. His father is alive and comes into the room at the same hour of the day as he died. The Rat Man is as convinced that he is alive, evidenced by his actions, as he is convinced that he is dead. These beliefs do not interfere with each other but run parallel in his psyche without their being perceived as in opposition—this as distinguished from such painful feelings as doubt and ambivalence.

Freud's strong faith in his complex of infantile conflicts and a death wish against the

father takes on the character of genetic history, which excludes the influence of other experiences. They are subordinate to the core complex, and the mother disappears from the case history. But she is alive in his working notes, and there it is evident that he both observed and did not observe her importance—two ideas, which dwell undisturbed side by side. It is as if she has become too intrusive for the two gentlemen, who seem to wish to strike her out of their consciousness. Instead a homosexual, sadistic father figure emerges, but there at the back lurks in her turn an invasive mother figure. Today we can only guess what Freud's reasons were for by-passing the Rat Man's divided and painful relationship to the woman, his mother.

But the significance of this early mother figure is worked through in silence by Freud, and perhaps the Rat Man's experiences contribute to the later formation of Freud's theory. I refer to the experience Ernst had when as a little boy he asked to creep under his governesses' nightgowns and touch their genitals, an incident which must have been very shocking. His discovery that Fräulein Rudolf lacked a penis must have been deeply traumatic, arousing castration anxiety. In little Ernst's fantasy the threat his father may have made might have meant that he himself could lose his own. Everyone evidently does not have a penis; some have been deprived of it. A way out was to deny what he had felt. Fräulein Rudolf certainly has a penis or...? Might the consequence of his denial have been that he became obsessed by

seeing naked girls in order to check on how things really were? And was it because he had such anxiety that he would lose it that his own penis constantly called attention to itself?

One may speculate further over what happens in the boy's fantasy when he is not able to avoid the perception that there is no penis. He can, nevertheless, continue to deny that his mother does not have one. Must he then create a mother who has everything? For behind his mother's deficiency lurks the phantom of the absent mother. This is why the two irreconcilable ideas, that she both has and does not have a penis, dwell undisturbed side by side. Since reality is much too overwhelming, one takes refuge in the idea that it is possible to have everything. According to Freud, such an illusion opens the door to fetishism and the theory of the

splitting of the ego mentioned earlier (Freud 1927b, 1938a), the same process we saw in reference to the Rat Man's denial of his father's death.

No doubt the governesses represented his mother for the Rat Man; their seductions must have seemed like a real castration since he was too little and for that reason clumsy. The governesses' scorn surely contributed further to his hatred of women—a hate which had to be concealed because it was forbidden and dangerous since it above all concerned his mother and his fiancée. Yet it was exposed time and time again during the analysis. The Rat Man's ambivalence and indifference to his “lady” was evident, but neither Freud nor he himself seemed to realize the scope of his aggressivity. At the first meeting with the Rat

Man, Freud reports his “*fears* that something might happen to two people of whom he was very fond—his father and a lady whom he admired.” But in the notes the passage runs, “He says that he also suffers from an *impulse* to *want to injure* the adored lady, an impulse which is usually smothered in her presence but which emerges when she is not there. But he always felt good when he was at a distance from her—she lives in Vienna” (Hawelka 1974, p. 1). In the edited version Freud has toned down the sadistic impulses directed toward the woman and once again pulled out the father’s role.

When the Rat Man saw that the lady was treating him condescendingly, he remembers that he thought “she is a whore.” Freud makes the association that this also applied to his mother. Hatred for his lady breaks through when

the Rat Man feels abandoned or insulted. Separation anxiety, inconsistency, and doubt of her and his own love run like a red thread through the narrative, all of it serving as a defense against hate. When the “lady” went to visit her grandmother while the Rat Man was studying for an exam, he was struck by the compulsive idea of cutting his throat with a razor, after which the idea occurred to him that he should “go there and kill the old lady.”

It is clear that here, too, this turns on a displacement where the “lady” also stands for his mother, the object of doubt and alternation between love/dependency and hate/separation. The Rat Man is squeezed between his fear of being abandoned by the early mother, a death threat, and his fear of the violent father’s castration threat. Taking refuge with Father

Freud is tantamount to submission, that is, consent to anal rape. Afterwards it can be seen that Freud began to realize this, but he still did not have the theoretical concepts he needed. Freud's blindness to observations that today would rouse our interest is caused not only by the place of women in Freud's unconscious but also by the cultural atmosphere of his day, so difficult for us to imagine. The importance of the father's role in his child's psychic development was as obvious then as the mother's is today. But only a year after the analysis of the Rat Man, Freud is discussing men's tendency to disparage women and dividing up his image of women into whore and madonna (Freud 1910c, 1912a).

“He Was Hungry and Was Fed”

Both the Rat Man's and Freud's families were of Jewish origin and emigrated from the

same tract in Galicia. They had settled in Vienna several decades earlier. There were remarkable similarities in their backgrounds. As small children both had gone through the trauma of a sibling's death and both had a younger brother and several sisters as well as a domineering mother. Clearly the Rat Man knew about Freud and his family, but Freud, too, must have known about the Rat Man's family. This may have been why Freud insisted on seeing the photograph and even finding out the name of the Rat Man's "lady," who was also the Rat Man's cousin. He protested stubbornly against providing them, and Freud interpreted this as a resistance against being honest and as an eruption of fear in relation to him. But it can just as well be seen as an sign of Freud's completely private curiosity. When the Rat Man at last revealed the name of

his lady, Gisela Adler, Freud put three exclamation points after it!!! The love of Freud's youth was named Gisela Fluss and he had taken over the apartment on Berggasse from a friend, Viktor Adler (not related to Gisela), a prominent politician in the Vienna of that time (Mahony 1986).

The question is: How many of these feelings, which we might call counter-transferences, was Freud aware of? Counter-transference is a part of every analysis and the analyst must therefore reflect on his own unconscious if the counter-transference is to be an essential tool. Otherwise there is a risk that the analyst will inadvertently act it out, to the detriment of the analysis. Several analysts who have studied the interplay between Freud and his patient consider that the overheated contact between them caused a

rupture in the frame and that Freud did not note the hidden messages which the Rat Man was communicating to him (Gottlieb 1989).

If the intensive exchange between Freud and his patient is to be the object of study, the working notes will prove the more productive. In the published version, Freud naturally tones down his own person. Some of the following episodes can be found both in the notes and in the case history, but it is only in the notes that one can follow how one episode succeeds the other. When Freud edited the notes, it was not the communication between the two of them he wanted to throw light on but the Rat Man's unconscious. Freud made no secret of the fact that he felt great sympathy for the Rat Man. During the fifth session he notes: "In this connection I said a word or two upon the good

opinion I had formed of him, and this gave him visible pleasure” (Hawelka 1974, p. 21). Soon their relation intensifies and with that becomes more ambivalent. The Rat Man has to distance himself at the same time as his intensity forces out fantasies and word plays that are more and more extreme. He comments on Freud’s person and family members: “After a struggle ... he surrendered the first of his ideas. A naked female bottom, with nits (larvae of lice) in the hair.” An image that gradually, with great resistance, leads to Freud’s daughter, Anna, and his mother. “He had a picture of one of the deputy judges, a dirty fellow. He imagined him naked and a woman was practising ‘*minette*’ [fellatio] with him. Again my daughter!” (Hawelka 1974, p. 61).

At the next session Freud notes that the Rat Man “became depressed when I brought him

back to the subject.” Next comes a dream:

A fresh transference:—My mother was dead. He was anxious to offer his condolences, but was afraid that in doing so an impertinent *laugh* might break out as had repeatedly happened before *in the case of a death*. He preferred, therefore, to leave a card on me with “p.c.” [*pour condoler*, “my condolences”] written on it; and this turned into a “p.f.” [*pour féliciter*, wishing you joy]. [Hawelka 1974, p. 63]

It is as if the Rat Man wants to say, “Herr Professor, you and I have something in common.” He is sending the message that he has unconsciously perceived Freud’s unconscious relation to his mother. Freud’s comment on the Rat Man’s dream testifies to his vindictiveness:

“Hasn’t it ever occurred to you that if your mother died you would be freed from all conflicts, since you would be able to marry?” “You are taking revenge on me,” he said. ‘You are forcing me into this,

because you want to revenge yourself on me.” [Hawelka 1974, pp. 63-64]

He agreed that his *walking about the room while he was making these confessions was because he was afraid of being beaten by me....* Moreover, he kept hitting himself while he was making these admissions which he still found so difficult. [Freud 1909b, pp. 283—284, Hawelka 1974, p. 64. The italics mark Freud’s underlinings in his working notes]

Freud observes the Rat Man’s behavior and emphasizes his fear of being beaten by him, but on the other hand he does not analyze its importance between them. Gottlieb (1989) says that the Rat Man never thought of Freud’s consulting room as a secure place and that the Rat Man’s evident fear that Freud was going to attack him physically was based on the Rat Man’s idea that Freud’s brother was the notorious Budapest murderer, Leopold Freud.

On the following day, after the above quotation, Freud writes in his working notes:

Next session was filled with the most frightful transferences, which he found the most tremendous difficulty in reporting. My mother was standing in despair while all her children were being hanged.... He knew, he said, that a great misfortune had once befallen my family: a brother of mine, who was a waiter, had committed a murder in Budapest and been executed for it. I asked him with a laugh how he knew that, whereupon his whole affect collapsed. [Freud 1909b, pp. 284-285, Hawelka 1974, pp. 65-66]

We will never know if it really was Leopold Freud the Rat Man meant. Freud's laugh breaks the tension and with that all the associations and fantasies that may have lain behind the idea that Freud's brother was a murderer disappear. But it is easy to suspect that the Rat Man's thought may have occurred to him as an answer to

Freud's "cruelty" in the earlier quotation. Even the thoughts that Freud's laugh may have aroused slip away. Here we see how a counter-transference reaction on the part of the analyst becomes a surrender to his own feelings and an infringement of the frame that makes all associations vanish into thin air.

Gottlieb says that the laugh is a reaction on Freud's part that arises from his own unconscious conflicts from specific historical events enacted when Sigmund Freud was 10 years old. He is alluding to the fact that Freud's uncle was convicted as a counterfeiter, an event reported assiduously, with anti-Semitic overtones, in the Vienna press. There were hints that even Freud's half brothers, who lived in Manchester, were involved. Gottlieb brings up this fact to show that the Rat Man's fantasies

about Freud's criminality and his response to them are not only a matter of the Rat Man's projections.

The next scene also confirms that there were powerful forces at work between Freud and the Rat Man. December 27 is the session during which the Rat Man tells of the nightly masturbation scene, how he looks at his penis in the mirror between his legs and thinks that it is too small. The working notes the next day begin with: "He was hungry and was fed." Presumably Freud invites his young protege to a meal, probably before the analysis session. Freud makes no further comment on this, but judging from the working notes, the Rat Man accepts. A week later he concludes the session with the fantasy that:

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, upon which the two pieces fell away (as though peeled off).

All he could say at first was that he disliked herrings intensely; when he was fed recently he had been given a herring and left it untouched. The girl was one he had seen on the stairs and had taken to be my twelve-year-old daughter. [Freud 1909b, pp. 307- BOS, Hawelka 1974, p. 96]

Here the Rat Man alludes once again to a woman's (girl's) hidden penis. He seems also to want to say to Freud: You can stuff your herrings up wife's and your mother's ass—suggesting a homosexual seduction. In another context the Rat Man explicitly states that Freud is hoping to have him as son-in-law because he would be a good match. Here also there is a strong mother transference that Freud underlines by feeding

him like a controlling mother. Or even a “captain” who would like to press a rat on him?

From this interplay it is clear that the Rat Man approached Freud in a naive, almost shameless manner, and that his sexualized word plays were a symptom intended both to shield him from intimacy and give him gratification. It seems as if the analytical relation became too personal and could not develop at a reasonable pace. This naturally reflected the needs of both parties and went on in secret. Freud certainly did not perceive the mutual wishes, either the Rat Man’s or his own. Instead these withheld wishes brought about some of what we today would call Freud’s breaches of the analytic frame. After the occasion of the meal, there was a continuous stream of material inspired by Freud’s action, but the relation seems to have been too

passionate. Perhaps this is why Freud refrains from analyzing the Rat Man's comments. There are also several other incidents where Freud's counter-transference is brought to light and where his method of running the analysis can be called into question. What made Freud invite the Rat Man into his private life? Was this an unconscious acting out because Freud was afraid that their relation would break down? Several of these episodes are not included in the edited version.

But as Lipton (1977) and others point out, such events may be seen as a sign of Freud's spirited, humanistic attitude. Lipton charges modern psychoanalysis with having turned technique into a goal in itself, turning the analyst into a robot. Freud probably assumed that certain manifestations of his personality were

outside the realm of psychoanalysis. There was a tacit agreement about what belonged to the psychoanalytical frame and what fell outside of it. In addition, for Freud there was probably no contradiction between the neutrality of the frame and the personal. Once again the problem may be that we can not imagine what Freud's cultural frame of reference looked like, much less make it comprehensible for us.

Still, much of Freud's technique ran directly counter to his own technical instructions. He knew that restraint, that is, the necessity to frustrate the patient's needs, was a prerequisite for the development of the analytical process. Freud thought he had to persuade and convince the Rat Man, and he seems not to have paid any attention to the consequences his transgressions might have. In one of the last of his working

notes, Freud writes: “He intimated that his friend Guthmann’s comments on the treatment might get him to give it up.” And in a letter to Karl Abraham the same year, Freud writes: “It has often been my experience that just those cases in which I took an excessively personal interest failed, perhaps just because of the intensity of feeling” (Mahony 1986, pp. 93-94).

Transference as an Obstacle to Understanding

Thus the Rat Man and Freud from the very beginning were involved in an intensive interplay, where Freud’s unconscious motives and conflicts also came to contribute to the fact that his interventions at times overstepped the boundaries of the psychoanalytical space. But naturally the focus was on the Rat Man’s

unconscious wishes, his neurosis, with Freud as a “co-actor.”

The Rat Man first had to “run” to Mother to ask for permission before he could make a decision to begin analysis (just as with his “penis”). By doing this he showed his readiness to submit to Freud (the mother). When Freud then emphasized the fundamental rule for the Rat Man, this inevitably became an attack on the latter’s integrity and even now one gets a presentiment of the power struggle that is brewing. Freud does not yet know that the power play is one of the cardinal signs of the obsessive neurotic.

The Rat Man responded with an attitude at once challenging and subservient, which “seduces” Freud into being even more intrusive

and hortative. In this respect the rat scene is illuminating. The Rat Man stands up and puts his arms in front of his face as if he were afraid of being beaten. He paused in his narrative to defend himself and Freud filled in “into his anus.” The Rat Man’s way of speaking with pauses, hesitations, doubts, and ambiguities tempted Freud to interrupt, become intrusive.

The longer the analysis proceeds, the more evident is the Rat Man’s open challenge, arrogance, and hostility to Freud. He here reveals both his fear of being “attacked” and his wish for it. In other words, it is obvious that the Rat Man’s dread of being beaten arises out of his fear of his own impulses, that is, wanting both to submit to his analyst, to be anally penetrated, and passively to benefit from his potency. As a

defence against this, he sets up a resistance to Freud.

By his transference the Rat Man exhibits his confused sex identity. He alternates between seeing Freud as a frightening man and a despised woman. “Also play on my name: ‘Freudenhaus-Mädchen’ [girls belonging to a House of Joy, i.e., prostitutes].” In fantasies about anal intercourse, a similar confusion emerges, where he is lying on his back on Freud’s daughter “copulating with her by means of the stool hanging from his anus.” Whereupon another fantasy follows: if he won the first prize in the lottery he would marry his cousin and spit in Freud’s face.

Freud notes further that rat’s tail means penis, and Ernst often pulls his mother’s braid,

now rather thin, calling it a rat's tail. The Rat Man goes on:

When he was a child, while his mother was in bed once, she happened to move about carelessly and showed him her behind; and he had the thought that marriage consisted in people showing each other their bottoms. In the course of homosexual games with his brother he was horrified once when, while they were romping together in bed, his brother's penis came into contact with his anus ... A large number of further associations, transferences, etc. ... also some hostile transferences to me. [1909b, p. 313, Hawelka 1974, p. 103]

Once again the female penis turns up. Whom does he want to be penetrated by? Whom is he terrified of? Is it the phallic, domineering mother or the violent father? His masochistic identification with his mother seems to be part of his effort to couple with his father, and Freud

becomes the object of his longing. And Freud responds affirmatively to his wishes by his kindly attitude and his specific invitations. A more correct view of Freud's interpretation that the Rat Man has a deeply rooted wish to kill his father might be that he is hiding his deep longing—his homosexual tendency. Freud seems to avoid entering more deeply into and analyzing the hostility to his person, giving it instead the interpretation that in the transference the Rat Man is repeating his fear and his hate of his father, who was so impulsive that the Rat Man never knew when he was going to attack.

Because his father's violence and physical advances provided too powerful a stimulus, erotic wishes were aroused (Shengold 1967), leading to his identification with the woman (the mother) as he perceived her, and this in its turn

aroused a latent homosexuality. But homosexuality must evoke dread and revolt, since it is forbidden and brings with it the risk of strengthening a submission that is tantamount to castration. The predominant transference fantasy, to couple with Freud, to incorporate his penis anally, is thus tantamount to being beaten or raped by him. This is why the Rat Man has to stand up, walk around the room, and shield his face. He calls Freud “Herr Captain,” an oppressor against whom he has to rebel in order to protect his masculine identity.

The little boy is trapped in a pregenital instinct gratification, since the threat of castration for the Rat Man meant that he was squeezed between a powerful, archaic mother and a father figure no less frightening. He makes this dilemma clear at the start when he describes

the following: “I fingered her genitals and the lower part of her body which struck me as very queer.... After this I was left with a burning and tormenting curiosity to see the female body.” The Rat Man associates this episode with running to his mother, that is, that he has given up the separation efforts of the growing boy for the benefit of his obsession with looking, of penetrating the female body by his gaze, taking possession of it. Looking becomes synonymous with controlling, a sadistic desire. The Rat Man’s need to seduce Freud becomes an aspect of the numerous manifestations of anal sadistic pleasure that are described during the analysis. This is discussed by Grunberger (1966) and Shengold (1967, 1971), among others. Freud takes up this instinct in “The Disposition to Obsessional Neurosis” (1913a), where he works

out his theory of the obsessive neurotic's fixation on erotic anal sadism.

We can thus establish that the Rat Man's ambivalence permeates his relation to Freud in many and varied ways and that Freud often takes for granted that this transference is of a paternal nature. But at the same time one is struck by how the Rat Man both asks for help for his suffering from Freud (the mother) and simultaneously denies any such need. He confides in Freud just as openly and trustingly as he did when he ran to his mother and complained about his erection. But by so doing he spread his inner being out in plain view, an invitation to psychic rape. ("I see in this the beginning of my illness.") It was as if he was unconsciously delivering the message: "May I go my own way?" but Freud was not able to

receive it since he himself had unelaborated conflicts and was tied to his mother. Did Freud feel unconscious guilt for this limitation of his and was this what drove him to invite the Rat Man to a meal? Freud expresses this side of the transference much more openly in the working notes. We may feel the dawning of insight on Freud's part into the importance of the early mother, but this knowledge has not yet matured enough to be described theoretically.

Freud's view of transference at this time was a factor in his helplessness. He was inclined to regard transference as an obstacle, something the patient took to when early painful memories threatened to come to the surface. By making use of transference and looking backward, Freud availed himself of the intensely emotional atmosphere in the room "here and now" only as

a reflection of earlier situations, for example in relation to the father, reconstructing the Rat Man's reactions to himself in terms of childhood events. Freud's interest was directed toward retrieving memories rather than toward working through the transference in the room. His attention was not on what the Rat Man wanted of him or how his own conduct related to the Rat Man's previous experiences; for Freud what happened between them reflected only the past. Freud had still not realized the importance of letting his own person come into focus in order to probe more deeply into both aspects of the transference, the current and the past, and out of that discern what the analyst had contributed.

Submitting to the Fundamental Rule

We can discern how Freud is wrestling with his own shortcomings as he gropes his way

along in what is for him still unexplored territory. We can see his exceptional ability to draw theoretical conclusions and develop the psychoanalytical method, even if he has still not integrated these discoveries into his own technique. This also applied to his own interpretation of the relation between free associations and the fundamental rule, where he seems to have been influenced by the power struggle between himself and his patient.

As we noted, Freud introduced the fourth session by pointing out to the reader that “the true technique of psychoanalysis requires the physician to suppress his curiosity and leaves the patient complete freedom in choosing the order in which topics shall succeed each other during the treatment.” This was an idea he also took up at the meeting of the Psychoanalytical

Association on October 30, and November 7, 1907. His colleagues in Vienna met regularly to discuss the scientific progress of psychoanalysis. At these two meetings Freud presented the initial stages of his interesting case to his colleagues. According to the minutes he stated: “The technique of psychoanalysis has changed. Nowadays the analyst no longer goes in search of that material which is interesting to him but leaves the patient to develop his ideas and thoughts in their natural course” (Federn 1948, p. 15). Did Freud live up to this ideal? Patrick Mahony (1986) comments on this quote by saying that the treatment of the Rat Man shows that Freud “still had not mastered the technical requirements to facilitate free association” (p. 91).

Freud's original discovery was that psychoanalysis is a "talking cure," that the very process of putting words to all the thoughts and ideas that come up, so-called free association, is curative. Freud formulated his fundamental rule to describe to the patient what the condition for the analytical process was. The goal ought to be to help the patient find his own words, become one with his language, to gain entrance to and explore the boundaries of the conscious. The analyst was not to fill his patient's inner being with his own constructions because that would be tantamount to suggestion. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Freud emphasizes his departure from earlier traditions of interpretation by pointing out that what is essential is not the dream interpreter's associations but what the dreamer thinks about in connection with a

certain dream element. The interpretation should make it easier for the patient to associate further when displeasure and other feelings place obstacles in the way.

It can be said that in the analysis with the Rat Man, Freud was reminded of his original observation that the patient should be given space to discover his own unconscious thoughts and put them into words. And in all fairness it must be said that the Rat Man did get a lot of space. But if he took too much he collided with Freud's own need to test his theories. As has emerged, part of the Rat Man's problem was that it was vitally necessary for him to take up the cudgels for his autonomy, and he did not agree with Freud's theoretical constructions (for example, the father complex and masturbation); instead they both staged a tug of war.

My impression is that Freud played his part in this battle since he was guided more by his wish to confirm his theory than by the Rat Man's analytical material. It as if Freud assumes that all scepticism is synonymous with resistance and that the patient spontaneously feels an aversion to his theories. Roy Schafer (1992) says that Freud needed his concept and stayed locked in it because the "resistance" to his ideas he encountered from the medical establishment drove him into a defensive position. To some extent his creative work came to a standstill under the influence of a definite negative counter-transference.

To Freud, the Rat Man's doubts were automatically the expression of resistance to the unconscious, which as a matter of fact they may have been, but how could the Rat Man have

phrased his objection? A *yes* would mean an adaptation to Freud's ideas, a *no* was resistance. His feeling that Freud was imposing himself on him as if it were Freud's thoughts that counted made him deprecating. This is an indication of Freud's resistance to realizing that his theory may have prevented him from seeing that the material might not support his interpretations. Freud emphasizes to the Rat Man that "he must never lose sight of the fact that a treatment like ours proceeded to the accompaniment of a *constant resistance*; I should be repeatedly reminding him of this fact."

It is not enough to reach unconscious meanings, but the analyst has to interpret in order to draw the patient's attention to what he does not want to discover. By definition, the patient is unconscious precisely because his

insight is too painful and full of conflict. But in Freud's hands the interpretation tool becomes an obstacle to the Rat Man's free associations and disrupts the analytical process. And Freud appears to overestimate the influence of interpretation on the unconscious. He still did not have sufficient confidence in the patient's own words, and he had still not realized the importance of allowing the patient to work through his own discoveries over a long period of time. In a letter to a contemporary, Karl Abraham, Freud writes that when he has understood symptomatic behavior in himself, it ceases (Mahony 1986). Undeniably this idea is based on an omnipotent expectation. The idea that an accurate interpretation of the unconscious conflict induces the patient to

change may give the impression that the analyst is in possession of a magic instrument.

When Freud formulates his fundamental rule, he calls the Rat Man's attention to his presence, arousing a strong reaction. Because of its appeal to associate freely, the fundamental rule becomes a paradox, built into the psychoanalytical method. It provokes the obsessively neurotic Rat Man, on the one hand because it is controlling, causing defiance, and on the other hand because it implies a directive to let go of his logical reasoning, which considering his fear of his inner forces must be threatening. Because of this the fundamental rule came into conflict with the free flowing attentiveness that both parties should have been aiming for. Instead it must have appeared to the Rat Man that the fundamental rule was beyond

all negotiation, and at that moment Freud became instead a representative of the divine law to which the Rat Man had to submit. And he also identified with the oppressor, revealed by his slip of the tongue, “Herr Captain.” Freud became the authority, and if the Rat Man tried to free himself from his identification with his oppressor by opposing the inflexibility of the fundamental rule, it would be tantamount to breaking the law.

The Rat in the Anus and His Vision of the World

At the risk of distorting Freud’s many-faceted theorizing about the origin of obsessive neurosis, I must say I find that the Rat Man’s inability to shield his integrity from infringement, from outside as well as inside, runs like a red thread through the entire case.

The conflicts involving integrity and inner autonomy are what bind his various symptoms together. The rat, which penetrates his anus and overwhelms his inner world of thoughts, symbolizes violation. This finds expression in his linguistic and emotional ravings and in his ambiguity, which to a great extent adds to the problems Freud has in organizing the material. The Rat Man showers Freud with a multitude of associations, especially concerning the symbolic meanings of the rat. Many have maintained that his confusing richness of linguistic associations should be included as a part of the Rat Man's symptomology and that these associations almost neutralize Freud's analytical potency (Marcus 1984).

The Rat Man really makes use of the rat. From having been an account of fear of anal

rape and his own vindictive impulses, the story of the rat gets so many vacillating meanings that it completely slips out of Freud's control. Freud notes, "More rat-stories; but, as he admitted in the end, he had only collected them in order to evade the transference phantasies ...". The Rat Man seems sometimes to be making fun of Freud and sometimes to be so terrified that he hides behind his florid associations.

If one follows Freud's clinical material and his theoretical constructions, the Rat Man's own theory, "my parents knew my thoughts," fits in better with Freud's theory than what one is able to read from Freud's notes. The Rat Man believed that his thoughts were being revealed without his noticing it, that he had said things out loud without hearing them himself. Mahony (1986) supposes that the Rat Man had overheard

his parents' coition and it is unmistakably a matter of sexual fantasies. But the Rat Man seems to be more inclined to be afraid of being seen through than of having listened to something forbidden. The terror of losing control—the rat invasion—becomes a metaphor for an inadequate shield against impulses which may be exposed both to himself and the world around him. He continually creates new defense maneuvers—rituals and compulsive thoughts aimed at checking the sexual and aggressive impulses threatening to inundate his fantasy life. Freud and the Rat Man, without doubt, together embody the inability to mount a defense against overstimulation and infringement.

Being exposed to rats invading the rectum means that neither defecation nor what comes in through the body orifices can be maneuvered.

One loses control of one's boundaries, tantamount to psychic disintegration or death. The Rat Man fought with all the means at his disposal to defend himself by his way of conversing and reporting with pauses, hesitations, and linguistic gaps. He made his language incoherent with the intention of bursting the chain of associations and keeping thought and feeling separate from each other. Traumatic experiences are robbed of their emotional coloring and thought connections are broken. The affect that should be linked to the thought remains unconscious. For this reason neither the Rat Man nor Freud can understand what impulses lie behind the fantasies and actions. This psychic course of events, typical for obsessional neurotics, will be described by Freud a few years later by the term *isolating*.

Instead of repression, making himself unconscious of the content of his thoughts, the obsessive neurotic turns to isolating—a strategy for psychic survival.

The Rat Man thinks he is able to control his thoughts with the aid of isolating (and other strategies), and this leads to the illusion that thoughts can control impulses, an over-estimation of the power of thought. This defence is reflected in the Rat Man's concept of the omnipotence of thought, which he incessantly alludes to, but this brings with it the uncertainty such an concept creates about the borderline between thought and action. He made up his own prayers, recited "so quickly that nothing could slip into [them]." He is endowed with prophetic dreams. "He imagines that he is killing Dr. Schl. with his wish and that he was going to

save his life. He really thinks that he has twice saved his cousin's life by wishing." In his unconscious, his wish fantasies can bring about anything—for example, his sister's death, or the suicide of a young seamstress whose invitation he turned down when he was 20 years old. He had the power to grant or refuse love.

Since the Rat Man is convinced of the magical power of his thoughts, he has to devote all his energy to nullifying the disastrous consequences his fantasies may have. The function of the compulsive rituals is to try via magic to manage his unpredictable, dangerous impulses and to control what he has projected into reality. This way of thinking is part of the anal phase in the small child, a period in life when he is fighting for his autonomy and testing the limits of his body, when he has to learn to

master if and when he will let go of his excrement. The Rat Man has got stuck in the conflicts that are characteristic of this phase of development and is consequently strongly preoccupied with the anal theme, including smells, defecation, and so on.

The Rat Man exercises control over his inner forces by cutting the connections between feeling and thought. As the emotional coloring of words is peeled off, he can no longer understand what forces are on the rampage within himself. He is therefore full of doubt about what he really feels and thinks. The unconscious rage and sadism arouses a guilt, the origin of which it is not possible for him to find. His painful doubts are therefore mixed with self-censure. Neither can the Rat Man understand why he sees himself as a criminal. The only

signals he receives of the inner struggle between hate and love raging within him are doubt and anxiety. Obsessive neurosis is thus an effort to gain ascendancy over hate by the divide and conquer method. Here the various forms of compulsive actions—his way of speaking, the hesitation, the compulsion to continuously ask questions, and so on—have at the same time the unconscious aim of tormenting and exercising control over members of the immediate environment. In this way his sadistic wishes find an outlet that is directed against his mother, his fiancée, and Freud, a connection between anal sadism and obsessive neurosis that Freud describes but has still not made universally applicable (Grunberger 1966).

The Rat Man knew that his way of thinking was irrational, and he nullified the connections

between his trains of thought so as not to be able to track down the forbidden origin. But he was unconscious of his aim, which was to gratify his forbidden and unconscious impulses without he himself or those around him noticing it. These strategies limit to a great extent his inner freedom to think and fantasize, a restriction that grows and grows. At the same rate his freedom of action diminishes. To maintain the boundaries he must be very careful to be in control of everything so that impulse and thought are kept isolated from each other, for otherwise all kinds of things may be mixed together, an infection both attractive and appalling. Brushing against certain things or stepping on the cracks in the sidewalk may cause a terrible accident, perhaps to someone close and beloved. The magic is a shelter only if certain instructions are followed.

The Rat Man's fear of being infected symbolizes his fragile integrity, something he develops in relation to women. "If I touch her I don't know what may happen." Dangerous and contagious things flow in and out. If he comes close to Mother or the governess, he risks being humiliated or devoured. Intimacy is dangerous. In the absence of caresses his desire to see naked girls takes over, a shield against infection and a method of sadistic control. The regulations are not innocent; they allow the impulse itself to be hidden and gratified at the same time. This is why compulsive rituals can be interpreted and understood as unconscious messages.

"The Precipitating Cause of the Illness"

There have been many speculations about how seriously disturbed the Rat Man really was and to what extent his pathology contributed to

the contradictory impression he gave. In any case we can be certain that Freud had difficulty reconciling theory and treatment in the case of the Rat Man. According to Freud, the Rat Man had a constitutional predisposition to strong sadistic and sexual instincts that he had difficulty controlling as a child and that led him into insurmountable conflicts with those around him: his father forced him to repress such instincts and his pathological development was the result. According to Freud, this pathology was matched by special unconscious and conscious experiences which colored the patient's history and mode of action. Infantile neurosis is the prerequisite for the formation of symptoms, and in time outside events that are a reminder of the original complex can trigger symptoms of aggression and obsession. This causes Freud to

occupy himself with tracing separate episodes to explain why the symptoms came on. The episode that is “the precipitating cause,” with the import of a Trauma with a capital T, sets in motion a chain of inner processes in the Rat Man. Previous events take on the function of requisite conditions and etiological factors. This is reflected in Freud’s preoccupation with the Rat Man’s childhood. Theory says that neurosis dissolves when early traumatic experiences become conscious. Trauma was the trigger, that is, there is an unexpressed idea that certain predetermined conditions may cause specific symptoms. Here Freud brings with him the remains of his trauma theory and this guides his interpretations.

On the other hand, Freud writes in his case history that obsessional ideas “have an

appearance of being either without motive or without meaning, just as dreams have. The first problem is how to give them a sense ... so as to make them comprehensible.” Freud’s ideal was to allow ideas and associations to evolve and by so doing present a picture of unconscious conflicts, which in their turn could stimulate the analyst’s interpretations. A fundamental idea for Freud was that the symptom is a compromise between two incompatible and unconscious intentions. It may be an impulse that, if gratified, will be in conflict with conscience, to give one example. Seeing the symptom as an unconscious message, a story of how the patient has interpreted what has happened to him, is a different approach than looking for “events which precipitated the disease.” I think that both of these somewhat divergent sets of ideas may

have been responsible for Freud's being at a loss. He writes in another context that a symptom can never be understood by concentrating on individual external factors, for in psychic reality these may succeed each other endlessly.

But under the heading "The Precipitating Cause of the Illness," Freud is looking for causes which will explain the Rat Man's illness. In this hunt for the cause that has evoked the symptoms, Freud is searching for an external event, as if at that moment he has "forgotten" that a symptom has a plurality of determining factors and is created by inner dynamic conflicts. He therefore gets lost in the searching. It is not only the story of the rat torture that is the triggering factor. One time it is the father's death, another the aunt's death or Gisela's

rejection. But according to Freud the symptoms also function as an escape into illness. In his effort to find explanations, he switches from one cause to another and assigns similar weight to separate events. For Ernst his aunt's death and his mother's marriage plans were each the cause of his symptoms of illness.

But, says Freud on another occasion, actually it was the Rat Man's longing for children which was the "cause." Now Freud is talking about the lady's sterility as a factor that triggers the illness. He does not, however, take up the underlying idea that she is not good enough for the Rat Man. For my part, I can imagine that his decision to marry a sterile woman was a way of sterilizing his mother. There must not be any more children (rats=children=siblings). Freud does not discuss

to what extent this is an externalization of the Rat Man's own feeling of inadequacy, but he states in his notes that the Rat Man "quite unsuspectingly . . . told . . . [him] that one of his testes was undescended, though his potency is very good" ("cryptorchism," which may lead to sterility if it is double-sided). As I see it, this malformation almost certainly contributed to the Rat Man's doubt of his own adequacy as far as both potency and fertility were concerned.

The Case of the Rat Man is an Example of a Psychoanalytic Process

Freud's own notes show that during this short but intensive analysis the Rat Man got a glimpse of a great many of his unconscious conflicts. To my mind the Rat Man is incontestably the one of Freud's case that is the clearest example of a psychoanalytical process.

One is struck by the intensity and the intractability in the interplay between the parties, and the atmosphere appears to have been very free. In spite of objections it can be established that Freud succeeded in creating a work climate where “neurosis gets the courage to express itself’ (Sjögren 1989).

Did Freud’s needs get the upper hand? If this was the case, did the Rat Man notice it? The case is full of questions we will never get answers to. Even though Freud was guided by his own theories, he was nevertheless open to the unpleasantness the child Ernst experienced in connection with his sexuality and his father’s punishments. Freud ties together the rat symbols and brings out their many implications, and the Rat Man perceives Freud’s willingness to see and understand. Freud’s clinical sensitivity and

his ability to extract the essentials are even more remarkable considering the abundance of the material and the chaos inherent in it, as well as the brevity of the analysis. As I have tried to point out, the case of the Rat Man is marred by defects both in the clinical management and the theoretical base. This is, of course, not surprising considering that the analysis occurred so early in the history of psychoanalysis. It becomes all the more noteworthy that Freud succeeds in utilizing his own shortcomings to produce new theoretical and clinical constructions that are innovative and productive; in this respect the case of the Rat Man does not differ from Freud's other cases.

Was the Rat Man completely restored and free from his obsessive neurosis? We do not know, but considering the psychoanalytical

process described by Freud, the answer is only probably yes. On the other hand, the Rat Man was liberated from obsessive ideas about the rat torture and he achieved considerable inner freedom. We know, too, that Freud kept himself informed of how things were going for the Rat Man. While the analysis was going on he began his professional career in the law. Some years later he married his “lady.” After that there is no information. But in a footnote, written in 1923 and added to later publications of the case, Freud writes:

The patient’s mental health was restored to him by the analysis which I have reported upon in these pages. Like so many other young men of value and promise, he perished in the Great War. [1909b, p. 249]

Notes

1. *Notes upon a Case of Obsessional Neurosis* was first published in German in 1909 and has become known

under the title “The Rat Man.” The Swedish edition (1992) contains both Freud’s original case history and his working notes edited by E. Hawelka (1974) which is the only bibliographically complete edition of Freud’s case histories.

2. In *Freud and the Ratman* (1986) P. Mahony has presented an extremely thorough piece of research, where he provides the identities of the various persons concerned. I use these authentic names if they are important to the understanding of the case history. Freud himself was careful not to reveal their identity.
3. It is only this interview and the following seven sessions which Freud reports on extensively. They comprise more than a fourth of the edited case history. In his investigation P. Mahony has come to the conclusion that the working notes report more or less regular sessions from October 1 to January 20. After this, Freud saw Ernst Lanzer at irregular intervals until April. Thus the analysis was between 3 to 6 months long rather than the 11 months Freud maintained. All quotes are from the *Standard Edition* unless stated otherwise.
4. The presentation corresponds to the first eight sessions, including the interview. Measured by today’s standard the whole analysis was very short but we must bear in mind that a normal analysis today is conducted 4 times a week, while Freud analyzed 6

days a week and had longer sessions. This must have created a more intense atmosphere.

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