

## INTRODUCING FREUD:

# Case Histories: Dora, Rat-Man, Schreber

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### Session 1

In the Dora case we see all three stages in the development of the practice of psychoanalysis: (1) the analysis of symptoms; (2) the analysis of dreams; and (3) the analysis of transference. The case is centred on the analysis of two dreams, and Freud tells us that the treatment failed because he ‘failed to master the transference in good time’. The failure of the case – which clearly stung Freud – taught him that transference is the key factor in psychoanalytic psychotherapy. Nevertheless, despite his failure to bring the case to a successful conclusion, his understanding of the dynamics of the patient’s family, and his appreciation (finally attained right at the end of the treatment) of her dilemma, are of great depth and subtlety, and must have meant a lot to her – just as they render the story of her treatment alive for us. The Dora case has become a feminist classic and we will review the feminist critique of Freud, and feminist interpretations of its significance.

### Session 2

Freud regarded his analysis of the ‘Rat Man’ as one of his great successes. He is on top of the transference this time, and delighted to demonstrate in his account how his handling of it contributed to the success of the treatment. He also sets out in full, in the case history, his understanding of obsessional neurosis. Where hysteria revolves around repression of sexuality, his analysis of obsessional neurosis focusses on repressed hatred and violence. And since these emotions and impulses are felt towards those whom the patient loves, guilt is a major factor, and the problems of **ambivalence** dominate the picture. These ideas played an important role in Freud’s developing interpretation of religion and we will explore the way in which the thinking the Rat Man provoked ramified into his later theories.

### Session 3

Schreber was a high court judge who suffered a series of psychotic breakdowns during the second half of his life, developing a florid delusional system centred on the conviction that he had a personal mission to save the world from destruction – and that, in order to carry out this task it was necessary (for reasons laid down by God) that he be turned into a woman. He also developed delusions of persecution centred on his doctor at the asylum, and the memoir he wrote of his illness, describing his system of beliefs, led Freud to an understanding of paranoia as based on the mechanism of **projection**. The root of Schreber’s illness was an upsurge of homosexual libido, Freud hypothesised – of feelings and impulses so unacceptable to his ego that he could cope with his internal situation only by believing it was imposed on him by God, as part of plan to save mankind. Freud’s understanding of Schreber’s delusional ideas as a means by which he could re-connect with reality was ground-breaking, and his detailed interpretation of the patient’s belief system provides the other half of his analysis of religion, complementing the conclusions he drew from the Rat Man case. Freud’s analysis of Schreber has been (justly) criticised for ignoring the obvious role of the patient’s family and upbringing in his breakdown, but we can understand this omission if we bear in mind that, at the time he was working on it, the study was a major vehicle of his own self-analysis.