Freud, Minna, and Schliemann's 

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. . . It is a rule of psycho-analytic technique that an internal connection which is still undisclosed will announce its presence by means of a contiguity--a temporal proximity--of associations; just as in writing, if 'a' and 'b' are put side by side, it means that the syllable 'ab' is formed out of them. --Sigmund Freud, *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria*.

Minna Bernays, who became a member of the Freud household in late 1895 (Gay, 1908, 502), took a more active interest in Freud's work than did her sister, Freud's wife, Martha, who was four years her senior:

Minna was more intellectual than Martha, read foreign languages easily, was quite literary, and became a real support on his work. . . . Minna . . . really understood his ideas, and he was far more likely to discuss his cases with her than with Martha. . . . In conversation Freud remembered that in his loneliest and yet most creative years, the 1890's, only Minna and his friend Wilhelm Fliess had been able to sustain his faith in himself, for they believed in his intellectual achievement. . . (Roazen, 1975, 61)

Did Freud then feel he had married the wrong sister?

On May 28, 1899, Freud will pen a letter to Wilhelm Fliess in which Freud unwittingly reveals that he is passionately in love with Minna (please note the proximity of "Schliemann's . . . account of his childhood" to "Minna"): 
Friday they (Minna and the children, except Mathilde) are off to Berchtesgaden.

I gave myself a present, Schliemann's Ilios, and greatly enjoyed the account of his childhood. The man was happy when he found Priam's treasure, because happiness comes only with the fulfilment of a childhood wish. This reminds me that I shall not go to Italy this year. Until next time! . . . (Masson, 1985, 353)

Now, here is Schliemann, from the account which Freud "greatly enjoyed":

I talked of nothing else to my play-fellows, but of Troy. . . .

I was continually laughed at by everyone except two young girls, Louise and Minna Meincke. . . .

Minna showed me the greatest sympathy and entered into all my vast plans for the future. It was agreed . . . that as soon as we were grown up we would marry, and then . . . set to work excavating . . . lastly Troy. . . . I was now sure that Minna still loved me, and this stimulated my ambition. Nay, from that moment I felt within me a boundless energy, and was sure that with unremitting zeal I could raise myself in the world and show that I was worthy of her. I only implored God to grant that she might not marry before I attained an independent position. (Quoted in Cottrell, 1953, 37.)

Whereas Schliemann's beloved Minna never did accompany him to the city of his dreams, Troy (despite his wishes she didn't wait, but married another), Freud's beloved Minna did accompany him to the city of his dreams, Rome (September 1913). On the thirteenth day of their seventeen-day stay, which he called "delicious" (Jones, 1955, 103), Freud penned the following from the Eden Hotel to his disciple Karl Abraham:
. . . it is pleasant to watch [my sister-in-law] feeling more at home and growing more enthusiastic about Rome every day.

(Letter dated 21 September 1913; in E. L. Freud, 1960, 302-3)

Nine months latter, on 12 June 1914, Freud will give Sabina Spielrein advice regarding her longing for her former therapist-lover Carl Jung--advice which, vis-à-vis his longing for Minna, the author believes Freud followed faithfully:

. . . Warm your life's intentions with your inner fire instead of burning yourself up with it. Nothing is stronger than controlled and sublimated passion. You can achieve nothing while you are at loggerheads with yourself. (Letter in Carotenuto, 1982, 122.)

REFERENCES


NOTE

Freud penned the above to Fliess on May 28, 1899. The previous August, Freud (42) and Minna (33), while vacationing in the Swiss Alps, stayed at the Schweizerhaus in Maloja. In September 2005, examining the inn’s log, Dr. Franz Maciejewski discovered Freud’s entry: "Dr Sigm Freud u frau [wife" (room 11). “By any reasonable standard of proof,” Dr Maciejewski concluded, “Sigmund Freud and his wife's sister, Minna Bernays, had a liaison.” This author, however, is not convinced.

(This note is based on Ralph Blumenthal’s December 24, 2006, New York Times article, “Hotel Log Hints at Illicit Desire That Freud Didn’t Repress.”)

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