

Freud, Minna Bernays, and Schliemann's Ilios

by

Robert L. Lippman, Ph.D.

:

...[Michelangelo] has modified the theme of the broken Tables; he does not let Moses break them in his wrath, but makes him be influenced by the danger that they will be broken and makes him calm that wrath, or at any rate prevent it from becoming an act, In this way he has added something new and more than human to the figure of Moses so that the giant frame with its tremendous physical power becomes only a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself. –Freud (1914),”The Moses of Michelangelo”.

. . . 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. – Freud (1901[05]). Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria.

Minna Bernays, who became a permanent 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 in 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 fulfillment of a childhood wish. This reminds me that I shall not go to Italy this year. Until next time! . . . (Freud, 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.)

In 1898, the summer before writing the letter to Fliess, Freud (42) vacationed with Minna (33) in the Swiss Alps, where, on August 13, they checked in at a hotel in Maloja. In September, 2005, Dr. Franz Maciejewski visited the hotel where he found, in Freud's distinctive handwriting, the entry he was seeking: "Dr Sigm Freud u frau [wife]" (room 11). Dr. Maciejewski concluded, "By any reasonable standard of proof Sigmund Freud and his wife's sister, Minna Bernays, had a liaison." (See Ralph Blumenthal's December 24, 2006, New York Times article, "Hotel Log Hints at Illicit Desire That Freud Didn't Repress.")

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, on the other hand, 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 wrote the following from the Hotel Eden 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) .

Hotel Eden ... “delicious.” Had Freud, then, actually sampled forbidden fruit? Not then or ever, according to Albrecht Hirschmuller (2007), editor of the correspondence between Freud and Minna Bernays: “The letters do show a relationship of mental and personal intimacy, as between siblings, but they do not in any way hint at a love affair, nor do any of the other available historical sources.” [From Abstract] By giving him courage to persevere during “the years of struggle,” as Freud called them-- well before he became FREUD---when he desperately needed it, Minna, without her knowing it, had helped him prepare the ground for his Promised Land, an enlightened secular world in which anti-Semitism being unknown. the seed of Abraham can move freely across frontiers, develop their talents, and satisfy their needs (Lippman, 2016). Unlike Theodor Herzl, Freud doesn’t broadcast his Promised Land. Secrecy is essential. His creation, psychoanalysis, must not be seen, like Herzl’s Zionist movement, as a Jewish National Affair. And as Freud well knew, a sexual scandal--especially with a sister-in-law-- would jeopardize the realization of his Promised Land. [He had firsthand knowledge of contraceptive failure: the birth of his daughter Anna in 1895, two years prior to the supposed “liaison” with Minna in Majola (Shapiro, 1996, 557)].

Nine months after that ‘delicious’ visit to Rome, Freud will pen Sabina Spielrein, then twenty-eight, advice regarding her longing for her former therapist-lover Carl Jung,

. . . 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 of June 12, 1914, in Carotenuto, 1982, 122.).

Vis-à-vis his cruel predicament of being torn between his Promised Land, and, on the other hand, his longing for Minna, Freud, in my view, took to heart his own counsel, channeling his “inner fire” or red-hot desire for his Minna in the service of his envisioned Promised Land, that is, of turning it into an actual reality--and thereby accomplishing his secret mission: the deliverance, once and for all, of his besieged nation from that perpetual scourge, anti-Semitism.\*

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\*Apposite here is the following from the lead quote; “...[Michelangelo’s *Moses*] ...a concrete expression of the highest mental achievement that is possible in a man, that of struggling successfully against an inward passion for the sake of a cause to which he has devoted himself.” Ernest Jones and other analysts maintain correctly that this observation of Freud’s pertains to his red-hot anger towards his then rebellious ‘sons,’ Jung especially; that is to say, *for the sake of the cause to which he has devoted himself*--psychoanalysis--Freud, by heroic self-possession, would contain his wrath. Freud’s observation, however, pertains as well to his illicit red-hot desire for his beloved “*schwester*” Minna. That is to say, *for the sake of the cause to which he has devoted himself*-- the deliverance of his besieged people from anti-Semitism--Freud would *struggle against* his intense *passion* for Minna.

Eleven months earlier, on the 25th of May, Freud, at Berggasse 19, handed each of his five favorite adherents an ancient stone engraved with a scene from classical antiquity to be mounted into a gold ring like his own. When handing out these five precious stones that Sunday afternoon did one more ‘recipient’ come to Freud’s mind, arguably the person most deserving of such a stone --a stone, moreover, already set in a gold band?

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