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Love in Vienna: The Sigmund Freud Minna Bernays Affair by Barry G. Gale:
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Barry G. Gales’s study of the possible affair that took place between Sigmund Freud and his sister-in-law, Minna Bernays is a non fictional follow up to his 2013 novel, Belle Vue, on the same subject. To write both a novel and a non fictional survey on the same—seemingly somewhat narrow—theme might suggest a certain unhealthy obsession with the intimate private life of one of the most influential intellectual figures of the twentieth century. However, it is the father of psychoanalysis that is being dealt with here, and any hidden affair in his background inevitably impacts his stature as the plain talking, morally upright and somewhat monolithic interpreter of dreams whose tendency was to see a sexual impulse behind most of our subconscious experiences. It would be disturbing to many to learn that the paternal and somewhat frigid figure who explained the dreams of upper middle class Viennese society in such a seminal and pioneering way, was not a kind of substitute god figure after all, but himself a creature with the same compulsions and sexual secrets as his clients: a tin god—like all the rest of the self-appointed intellectual Messiahs of the 20th century. The question of whether Freud had an affair with Minna Bernays has unusual importance then within the context of Freud’s life and the history of psychoanalysis.

It has been common knowledge for a long time that Freud enjoyed a remarkably close relationship with his sister-in-law Minna Bernays. His wife Martha produced six children for him, but possessed little or no interest in his work and dedicated her life to simply running Freud’s home. She was unable to understand the importance of the work her husband was doing and even referred to it as “pornographic” to a friend”. In contrast, Minna was bright and eager to learn from Freud. Gale points out that Freud was essentially a lonely and isolated man who received little emotional solace from his wife and home life. In these circumstances it was likely enough that he would feel attracted to his wife’s sister who was extremely intelligent and possessed a kind of hero worship for Freud. There is no dispute that Freud and Minna were extremely close for a number of years and there is documented proof that they took some breaks and holidays together. The question that Gale addresses in this book is whether their relationship was sexual in nature. The evidence for it having been sexually intimate comes from Freud’s brilliant colleague Carl Jung, who published an account of how he was approached by Minna and asked for advice concerning her relationship with Freud. In his published account, Jung refers to the relationship as having been “intimate”; but to friends it seems he was more forthright and spoke of “sexual relations” between Freud and Minna. Gale spends time documenting how Freud’s supporters have asked why Minna would confide such things to Jung when apparently she never took anyone else into her confidence. Gale, however, convincingly points out that at the time of Minna’s “confession”, Jung was seen as being Freud’s closest companion and brilliant
successor. Moreover, he was liked and trusted by women and was exactly the kind of non-judgmental confidante that Minna would have sought out. Gale emphasizes the fact that Jung repeated the same story many times over a long period of years and it always remained remarkably consistent. His final conclusion based on the “confession” and other strong circumstantial evidence is that a sexual relationship did take place between Freud and Minna Bernays.

*Love in Vienna* is a meticulously researched monograph and Barry Gales is to be congratulated on the depth and detail of his investigation. However, the reader is finally left with a suspicion that perhaps two books—one fictional and one non-fictional—could be a little much to “answer” a question concerning the details of a personal affair between two people that can never be proved 100% satisfactorily one way or the other.