

**The Psychodynamic Duo: Freud and Jung on Batman and Robin**  
**[Excerpts from *Batman and Psychology: A Dark and Stormy Knight*]**

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Abstract

Because Sigmund Freud died the month before Batman debuted, the father of psychoanalysis never commented on the Caped Crusader's origin, and yet Freud's musings regarding Shakespeare's *Hamlet* may suggest that he would have seen the murder of 8-year-old Bruce Wayne's parents as a dark Oedipal fantasy. Both Batman and Hamlet lose parents to murder, and both use theatricality and deception in order to avenge those deaths. Whereas Bruce Wayne actively vows to avenge, relentlessly pursues his goals, and never hesitates to fight crime as Batman, Hamlet passively receives a ghost's charge to avenge, meanders through his plans, and hesitates to take action. Batman copes through healthier defense mechanisms (e.g., displacement, altruism) than the dysfunctional defenses Hamlet employs (e.g., repression, devaluation). Both Freud and his colleague Carl Jung may have said that Robin the Boy Wonder reminds Batman of himself and the reason for his crime fighting mission. Through Robin, Batman receives wish fulfillment as he helps the boy get the justice and mentorship that Bruce did not. Jung looked at literary figures and their stories as symbols representing universal archetypes. Bruce Wayne's Batman identity represents the Shadow archetype. Batman being a hero complete, readers rarely see the steps he took between his parents' deaths and his heroic activities. As if to satisfy the inherent craving for tales to represent the Hero's journey, the creators added a hero *incomplete*, a student for Batman to mentor, a Boy Wonder who will grow up.

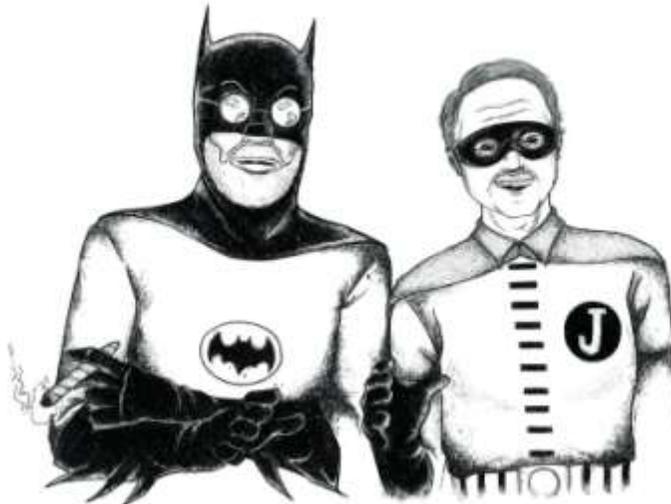


Image caption: Illustration by Marko Head.

Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) died the year Batman debuted, in the month before the character's origin saw print. While the founder of psychoanalysis never commented on our hero's background, he wrote a great deal on related topics from which we might infer what he would have had to say. The role of early childhood experience and the power of trauma to route the course of personality, the very things that created Batman, fascinated Freud. To him, early experiences create conflicts and unconscious turmoil we wrestle with throughout our lives. Conscious of the circumstances that drive him, Batman in many ways is ahead of most people.

Freud, perhaps the most famous figure in the history of psychiatry and psychology, developed the first and best known formal theory of personality. Many later personality theories arose either to elaborate upon or to oppose Freud's views. He stirred controversy with his proclamation (soon withdrawn) of cocaine as a wonder drug for treating mood disorders (Freud & Byck, 1974; Thornton, 1983) and his **psychodynamic perspective** which asserted that our own minds play tricks on us, that unconscious processes that elude awareness guide our conscious lives, and that the human sex drive spurs personality development from infancy into adulthood (Freud, 1940). A number of followers who initially intended only to expand upon his theory – like Carl Jung, Karen Horney, and Erik Erikson – each came to break away as their ideas came to contradict his, often beginning with disagreements over sexuality's role (Erikson, 1959; Freud & Jung, 1974; Horney, 1939). Rather than minimize the importance of the unconscious mind like some neo-Freudians, Jung emphasized it more heavily than Freud, adding a deeper dimension popular in the study of heroes: the collective unconscious shared throughout our species (Jung, Henderson, von Franz, Jaffé, & Jacobi, 1964). Despite controversies, both Freud and Jung remain influential to this day and provide frameworks for analyzing fictional characters and their stories.

Most psychologists are *not* Freudians. Freud's ideas frequently lacked **falsifiability** – disprovability, meaning that no conceivable empirical outcome could have contradicted him. He said stairways in dreams represent sexual intercourse (Freud, 1899/1965, p. 390). You cannot prove that wrong any more than you can prove no organ grinder ever played cribbage in any of your ancestors' kitchens. Einstein asserted that faster than light travel is impossible. Because a single supraluminal jaunt would refute his assertion, the idea itself – whether right or wrong – was scientific. One important reason why Jung broke away from Freud was that Jung, although a religious man, felt dogma in any form – in Freud's case, his insistence that sexual foundations underlay all psychological development – had no place in an empirical discipline.

Nevertheless, we can easily speculate on what Freud might have said about Batman. He said a great deal about how traumatic experiences will affect boys at around the age Bruce was when his parents died.

### Freud's Psychodynamic Foundations

The cornerstone of Freud's **psychoanalysis** was his view that the **unconscious** mind continually influences us in ways the **conscious** mind does not realize. In his view, early experiences shape personality and create inner conflicts we wrestle with throughout our lives. This unconscious turmoil stirs up difficulties in conscious life.

He felt that we have two main instincts driving our behavior: a **life instinct** that he called *Eros* for the Greek god of erotic love and a **death instinct** he called *Thanatos* for the Greek god of death. He had much more to say about the life instinct. We spend all our time being alive and only a certain portion of it focusing on death and destruction. The life instinct or **libido** (all mental energy) would drive sex, activity, construction, creativity, hunger, and all the activities involved in keeping us and our species going – the kind of things for which playboy Bruce Wayne pretends to live. So Batman's ongoing efforts to save lives, as a life-oriented activity, would be his form of sexual expression on "Planet Freud". Seeing this as one wide-ranging instinct, Freud considered it all sexual in nature. The death instinct, on the other hand, would prompt aggression, destruction, and preoccupation with morbid topics. Dwelling on this could create antisocial or suicidal inclinations. The death instinct can serve life. Sometimes you need to fight off the wolves. Sometimes you must demolish one thing in order to build another. Batman's aggression and his terrifying image help him shield others from fates like his family's.

A Freudian might take the view that the three-part Batman character (Bruce's playboy façade, Batman the superhuman symbol, and the real man behind both) represents the three major structures of personality – not that they directly are the three structures, simply that they could symbolize them. At the beginning of life, personality consists of nothing but **id**, the innate animal self driven by those inborn instincts. It operates on the **pleasure principle**, seeking immediate gratification, immediate fulfillment of needs and desires. Playboy Bruce would embody the id. Around age three, we develop the **ego**, the executive structure which includes the conscious mind and learns to operate on the **reality principle**. Whereas an infant has no concept of patience, no initial tolerance for waiting, a child will learn that we can often achieve greater satisfaction by waiting. Because Batman is the main self, the identity that all Bruce's other efforts support, he might represent the ego. When his surrogate mother, Dr. Leslie Thompkins, gestures to the bat insignia on his chest and says, "This is not the real you, Bruce," he tells her in *Detective Comics* #574 (1987), "It is the only me there is, Leslie." Batcave Bruce, the hero unmasked and partially costumed down in the Batcave, the one place he might speak freely or reveal his injuries, sits at his giant computer using analysis and rational thought to achieve things his fists cannot – guided by the basic morality exemplified by surrogate father Alfred, who represents his conscience. This part of the superhero could represent his **superego**. Both id and superego influence the ego, which must balance their respective wants to forge its own path, something strong-willed Batman with his great strength of ego should handle well.

Why is Batman so strong-willed? Where did he get such discipline and self-control? Freud would credit Bruce's toilet training. Freud believed we experience a series of **psychosexual stages of development** that sculpt our psyches and have lasting impact throughout our lives, each stage focusing on a different **erogenous zone** (sexually excitable area) with a distinct manner by which we go about satisfying those life and death instincts. In any stage, a person might develop a **fixation**, failing to outgrow that stage emotionally whether

because of trauma, underindulgence (creating a lingering ache to satisfy unfulfilled needs), or overindulgence (making the child too comfortable to want to mature).

Whether Bruce's parents died when he was 6 as Frank Miller writes (*Batman* #404-407, 1987) or 8 according to Dennis O'Neil (*Secret Origins*, 1989) and others, the boy would have recently passed through the phallic stage's most intense conflict, which Freud considered early life's most important issue. He believed phallic stage fixation could produce **narcissism** (obsessive self-love), **flamboyance** (running around wearing a cape surely qualifies), or **homosexuality** (despite a lack of subsequent evidence to show that he was right about that). While he might have concurred with psychiatrist Wertham's contention (1954/2004, p. 190) that Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson were living a homosexual "wish dream," Freud did not view homosexuality as deviant.

Freud's (1909) key ideas about the phallic stage originated in his treatment of a boy he called Little Hans in his writings. Hans suffered such severe *equinophobia*, fear of horses, that he would barely go outside, horses being as common circa 1900 as cars are today. Freud concluded that the reason Hans was so afraid of being bitten by a horse was that he was in love with his mother and afraid his father was going to castrate him. Freud considered him a little Oedipus, after the figure from Greek tragedy who kills his own father and marries his mother – hence, the **Oedipus complex**. Regardless of whether Freud was right about Hans's fear of a horse biting him symbolizing the deeper fear that his father might castrate him, Hans did have fantasies about marrying mommy, animosity toward his father, and preoccupation with the fear that they might cut off part of his anatomy – although in his case, he has reason for the castration anxiety. He had been told that if he did not stop fidgeting with his "widdler," it would get cut off – and his sister did not have one. They would have done it before! Many sources erroneously credit Freud for proposing an equivalent **Electra complex** for girls when, in fact, Freud refuted Carl Jung's (1913) Electra proposal. Freud generalized Hans's phallic preoccupation to all children, positing that castration anxiety worried every little boy and **penis envy** irked every little girl. Hans eventually began acting more like his father, incorporating the man's manner and moral values, which Freud interpreted as an act of **identification**, becoming more like the father in order to get along with him. Each little boy supposedly develops his superego, the conscience, so dad will not threaten his penis and each little girl develops hers so she can psychologically grow one.

In Freud's view, therefore, Bruce had undergone that entire conflict – including a wish to have his father out of the way and occasional resentment toward his mother for being with his father – but could have recently resolved this by identifying with his father and crystallizing his superego, his moral core. Now entering latency, that period of time when Freud of all people did not see much of anything sexual going on, the boy would no longer have been the sex fiend he was back at age 5. (Remember, we are still exploring "Planet Freud" for the moment – most of us do *not* consider preschoolers' underlying motivation primarily sexual in nature.) Instead his mind was opening itself up to picking up new skills and learning about the great big world, right when a mugger's bullets shattered that world.



Image caption: Young Bruce immediately understands the horror of his parents' murder and makes meaning of it. © DC Comics, used with permission.

### **Batman vs. Hamlet Act I: Murder Most Foul**

To help us speculate on what Freud might have said about Batman, we can glean clues by looking at what he had to say about another fictional character whose parents get murdered, a young man with different Oedipal issues, William Shakespeare's Prince Hamlet. Differences between Batman and Hamlet still prove useful in this task. In both stories, the hero's father gets murdered first – Bruce's father Dr. Thomas Wayne by a mugger who wants to steal mother's pearls, Hamlet's father King Hamlet by the uncle who wants to steal the mother and the crown. Bruce witnesses the murder; Hamlet later learns his father's death had been a murder. Mary Wayne gets robbed and murdered; Hamlet's mother Gertrude gets married to her husband's killer and is later inadvertently murdered by him as well. Bruce has few doubts; Hamlet has them aplenty. Bruce knows that murder has occurred but not the killer's identity; Hamlet knows the killer's identity but needs to confirm that it was murder. Bruce Wayne is an active, decisive individual who knows what he wants, forms a plan, and pursues it; Hamlet is passive and uncertain, although to some extent he has good reason to proceed with caution. In case the spirit that visited Hamlet was not actually his father's ghost but was instead some demon trying to trick him into murdering a man, he first wants to prove murder happened at all. He and Bruce both want to be better than the killers they pursue. They both resist killing.

For centuries, scholars have contemplated why Hamlet goes through the elaborate ruse of acting insane while hesitating to kill his uncle even after establishing the man's guilt. Freud said Hamlet perceives his murderous uncle as "the man who shows him the repressed wishes of his own childhood realized" (1899/1965, p. 299). The killer reminds the son, at least unconsciously, of the part of himself that wanted to eliminate his father and have his mother to himself. Freud would likely have considered it significant that Bruce Wayne's father dies first. By taking the mother's necklace – established by later stories to have been a gift from Thomas,

a symbol of their affection – and shooting her too, the mugger would remind Bruce of any occasional resentment he had felt toward her for choosing father over son.

Both newly fatherless sons take oaths. Whereas Bruce actively chooses to avenge his parents, Hamlet receives a spectral mandate to avenge. Note that in their respective oaths, neither son vows to slay his father's slayer, neither promises to punish the man who has given his own Oedipal fantasy its reality. Bruce swears to take action, "to avenge their deaths by spending the rest of my life warring on all criminals," not to devote himself to hunting down the man who killed them. Hamlet vows inaction, in that he gets his friends to join him in swearing only that they will not tell anybody they saw a ghost.

### **Batman vs. Hamlet Act II: The Defense Mechanisms**

One area where many psychologists view Freud favorably is his proposal that we use a variety of automatic tactics to protect ourselves from anxiety, especially against threats to self-image, often without realizing we are using these **defense mechanisms** (or *ego defense mechanisms*). We all lie to ourselves sometimes. We avoid topics that unnerve us, devalue things we cannot have ("sour grapes"), and shield ourselves from stress in many others ways. Sigmund's daughter Anna Freud (1936) deserves credit for giving names to numerous processes which her father had described without labeling and for identifying additional defense mechanisms he never addressed.

Freud saw *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* as a story of **repression**, whereby the unconscious mind hides disturbing wishes, thoughts, and experiences from conscious awareness. Unlike Oedipus, who killed his own father and married his mother, Hamlet saw a man other than himself live out his childhood Oedipal fantasy, a fantasy Freud (1899, p. 299) said Hamlet has repressed: "Thus the loathing which should drive him on to revenge is replaced in him by self-reproaches, by scruples no better than the sinner whom he is to punish." Batman's story, on the other hand, is one of **displacement**, acting on one's feelings but focusing them on a different target because the original target is inappropriate or unavailable – for example, rather than pursue your roommate's boyfriend whom you find desirable, you convince yourself you are having those feelings about his buddy. Because Batman never brings his parents' killer to justice, every hoodlum he hits serves as a substitute for the man who slayed them.

Using defense mechanisms can be healthy, even necessary, to keep harsh reality from overwhelming us. The American Psychiatric Association's (2000) *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* distinguishes the defenses that help us best cope with reality. These "mature" defenses, as Vaillant (1977) called them, maximize our ability to feel good about life while staying aware of memories, feelings, and thoughts. Hamlet still has his wit, his sense of *humor*, with a particular fondness for wordplay, but for the most part he utilizes fewer of these healthier defenses than Batman does. Bruce Wayne lives a life of **altruism, self-assertion**, and, even as distant as Batman might seem, greater **affiliation** with his sidekicks, superhero teams, and the rest of Gotham's Bat-Family (Batgirl, Batwoman,

Oracle, etc.) than anything Hamlet shows. Although each has a confidante (Alfred for Batman, Horatio for Hamlet), Hamlet more consistently than Batman cuts himself off from all others. **Thought suppression** helps Batman keep distractions from weakening his focus, but suppressed thoughts remain easily accessible to the conscious mind, unlike all the things Hamlet keeps repressed. Batman exemplifies one definition of the defense **introjection** in that he identifies so strongly with a particular image or symbol that he has incorporated it into his identity. Spending at least 15 years training himself in **anticipation** of his crime fighting mission differs markedly from Hamlet's often aimless hesitation. During that anticipatory period, Bruce Wayne passes up opportunities to develop friends and girlfriends, discarding college acquaintances even though he wanted them, "and the ache he felt seemed to fill his entire being. He learned to ignore the ache, and the pain of loss and isolation. These were the conditions of his life, and he accepted them" (*Secret Origins*, 1989, p. 7). Social and sexual drives get rerouted into training for his mission – this is an example of **sublimation**, feeling one need or impulse but channeling that energy into some other activity.

Both Bruce and Hamlet use **mental inhibitions**, the mildly neurotic defense mechanisms that compromise information, keeping fears and other potential threats hidden from our awareness. Like a police detective who must separate whatever feelings he has about a case from the thoughts and actions needed to do his job, Batman has feelings but must **isolate** those affective reactions from the brutal reality he faces. He tries not to let shock slow him down or anger blind his perception. He and Hamlet both channel emotional energy into analysis, but Hamlet overanalyzes to the point of **intellectualization**, using reason to avoid confrontation with an unconscious conflict. Both use **reaction formation**, a type of sublimation in which the person has one impulse but does the opposite instead, as when they each drive away women they find appealing – in Hamlet's case, cruelly so.

Hamlet uses more dysfunctional defenses than Batman – **apathetic withdrawal** after his father dies, **idealization** of that father, **devaluation** of the mother, **rationalization** (making excuses) for his hesitation to avenge his father even after satisfying himself that his uncle committed murder, and **passive aggression** throughout. Hamlet is suicidal. Batman is not. He survived that night in the alley and remains a survivor night after night.

### **Batman vs. Hamlet Act III: Theatricality and Deception**

Both put on performances, one to expose a villain and the other to scare all villains. Hamlet plays the mad prince; Wayne plays both the bored playboy and the dark symbol that must become "more than a man." Deception permeates their relationships, especially those that should be most intimate (with notable exceptions being their respective confidantes), and yet they both enlist help in their deceptive practices. Playing "mad" helps Hamlet hide his suspicions toward his uncle but does nothing to help him expose or destroy the man. When a troupe of traveling actors happens to come along, Hamlet requests that they perform a specific play so that he might gauge his uncle's reaction when they depict a murder similar to his father's. Even those whom Batman deceives as Bruce Wayne, including Commissioner Gordon, help him with performances of his own.

When Hamlet finally uses violence, striking an eavesdropper behind an arras while hoping it is the uncle he still cannot bring himself to confront face to face, he begins to illustrate the advantages of Batman's healthier, more consistently active coping strategies. Hamlet kills the wrong person. Soon he shows signs of **psychosis** (mental illness or at least a temporary state in which the person is grossly out of touch with reality) when his father's ghost reappears but, unlike the Act I appearance when three others saw the ghost with him, his mother sees no ghost. Either she, having betrayed her late husband by remarrying so soon, is not permitted to see the ghost or Hamlet is having a **hallucination**, a psychotic symptom involving a false perception disconnected from real world stimuli. Batman does not have **delusions**, beliefs grossly out of touch with reality, nor does he hallucinate – not unless exposed to some supervillain's hallucinogenic toxin, spell, or telepathic whammy – but those are career hazards every superhero faces from time to time.



Image caption: Ducard (Liam Neeson) teaches Bruce (Christian Bale) the importance of “theatricality and deception” while trying to turn him against his late father’s memory in *Batman Begins* (2005). © Warner Bros.

### Batman vs. Hamlet: Curtains

Bruce Wayne carries out a long-term plan which includes avoidance of killing; what little plan Hamlet forms falls apart after he finally, blindly kills. Hamlet's fate demonstrates why Batman draws the line he will not cross: Once the killing starts, the wrong people can suffer – a mistake no one can undo. Of the seven characters killed in *Hamlet's* latter half, five were not the originally intended or hoped-for targets. Only at the play's end, when Hamlet stabs his uncle and then succumbs to his own envenomed wound, do the intended victims die.

Batman gets no Act V. His story in the comic books does not close. Numerous comics have presented variations of the character's possible future but never his canonical end. In fact, even those unofficial future tales tend not to end with his death (e.g., *The Dark Knight Returns*, 1986, *Kingdom Come*, 1996, *Batman #300*). Parallel universe stories that do depict deaths of

other worlds' Batmen often confirm that DC's main Batman has followed the wiser path (e.g., *Countdown* #14, 2008).

### The Inner Child: Robin

Whereas Sigmund Freud emphasized the importance of life's earliest years and would have dwelled on the Waynes' deaths, Carl Jung (1971) considered **individuation** (individual personality growth, integrating diverse aspects of oneself to form a whole and healthy identity) a lifelong process and would have cast his gaze wider across the entire course of Bruce Wayne's life. Despite acknowledging that early experience influences us, Jung felt psychological disturbances are more rooted in the present than in the past and that therapists should spend more time helping clients with the direction they're taking into the future.

Both would have said that Robin the Boy Wonder reminds Batman of himself and the reason for his mission. Robin is a living **symbol** of the boy Bruce had been when he lost his parents and the boy he might have become under other circumstances. After all, Dick Grayson looks like young Bruce, his parents resemble Bruce's, and both are about the same age when they witness their respective parents' murders. Subsequent Boys Wonder Jason, Tim, and Damian all look like young Bruce, and Batman swiftly fires the only official Girl Wonder, blond Stephanie Brown (*Robin* #128, 2004). Through Robin, Batman receives vicarious **wish fulfillment** as he helps the boy get what young Bruce did not: guidance, crime fighting as a father and son activity, justice, and thus closure. In their first case together, Batman and Robin send the Graysons' killer to jail.

Freud and Jung would have disagreed a bit on why Batman welcomes that symbol of his own childhood. Looking at how past crisis lingers with us via processes like fixation and repression, Freud might say that little boy Bruce, having never outgrown that night, always remained an important part of Batman's fixated psyche. Jung, on the other hand, felt that past conflicts tend to influence us most when *present* difficulties bring them up again. **Regression**, another defense mechanism, involves seeking comfort by reverting to behavior from an earlier point in life, like the toilet trained child who resumes bedwetting during her parents' divorce or the ex-smoker who lights up while going bankrupt. Jung agreed boys experience the Oedipus conflict, but he felt that it was unlikely to play an important role later unless the man reacted to current parental issues (e.g., Hamlet's ire toward his mother for remarrying so soon) by regressing or emotionally returning to a conflict long since left behind.

For Batman, Robin is not an unconscious symbol but rather a conscious reminder. In Robin's debut (*Detective Comics* #38, 1940), "Batman thinks back to the time when his parents, too, were innocent victims of a criminal," and he tells Dick, "My parents too were killed by a criminal. That's why I've devoted my life to exterminate them." By helping the boy get justice, Batman returns to his parents' murder and gets to experience what a better post-murder outcome could have felt like.

Jung would also examine Robin's role as a symbol of the Child archetype and that child's place in the hero's journey.

### Jung's Archetypes: Shadow of the Bat

"Patients suffering delusional episodes often focus their paranoia on an external tormentor, usually one conforming to Jungian archetypes," or so says psychologist Jonathan Crane, a fictional character also known as the Scarecrow in the 2005 motion picture *Batman Begins*. Carl Jung (1875-1961) mentioned Superman in his work, seeing Superman as the main personality and Clark Kent as Superman's Shadow, but we can only speculate on how he would have assessed Batman. Of particular importance is Jung's theory that the **collective unconscious**, an inborn stratum of the psyche inherited by all humankind, prepares us to perceive and create themes that fit abstract, instinctive patterns called **archetypes** which organize the things we see and do (Jung, 1919). Certain themes and character types emerge in the legends and myths of every culture in the history of the world. Jung (1936) said the archetypal pattern is not a question of inherited ideas, but of inherited possibilities of ideas. The Joker is no more an inherent feature of every human psyche than is the mischievous Norse god Loki, but each has qualities common to rascally characters that stir trouble, challenge heroes, and push mortals on to greater heights in tales told throughout time. They are symbols of the **Trickster** archetype. Each fits within its mold, imperfectly sculpted with touches added and bits trimmed away by myriad storytellers over the course of many years.

Jungian therapy involved helping the client both face reality and delve into the unconscious. In early treatment, the client encounters the principal features of the **personal unconscious** (the part of the unconscious gathered over a lifetime, not inherited): the Shadow and the Persona. The **Shadow** archetype represents your dark side, not necessarily your evil side but the part of you that is hidden, out of the light, the sum of those characteristics you wish to conceal from both the world and yourself. We fear it. In *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a potion that Henry Jekyll hopes might eliminate evil releases a person's darkest inclinations instead and lets his Shadow take control. Appropriately enough, given that Walter Gibson's *The Shadow* helped inspire the Dark Knight's creation (Kane & Andrae, 1989, p. 41), Batman is a Shadow character. Bruce Wayne confronts his own darkest nature early in life, chooses to work with it, and uses it to instill fear in others. His bright and dark sides work together to fight evil.

Superheroes commonly have Shadow foes, enemies that are twisted counterparts to themselves: Flash vs. Reverse-Flash; Green Lantern vs. Sinestro the Yellow Lantern; brutal gamma-mutated Hulk vs. super-smart gamma-mutated Leader. These twists take many forms. Superman has both Bizarro, a dim-witted super-strong freak who does harm through his ignorance, and Lex Luthor, a non-superpowered scientist who does intentional evil for self-serving purposes – each a funhouse distortion from a different angle. Because Batman is himself a Shadow character, his Shadow foes become more freakish, more complicated than strong/dumb/amoral or mortal/smart/immoral. Inspired by a movie poster featuring Spencer Tracy's Jekyll on half his face and his version of Hyde down the other, Two-Face mirrors the entire character, both Batman and Bruce Wayne at the same time but with both his sides

furthering evil. By letting a coin toss absolve himself of guilt and responsibility for his bad side's actions, the villain's unscarred "good" Harvey Dent side also serves wrongdoing.

The Joker – laughing, murderous, psychopathic, brightly colored Clown Prince of Crime – shadows only Batman, not the whole character. The Joker has no alter ego. Despite some depictions, most notably when mobster Jack Napier becomes the Joker in Tim Burton's film *Batman*, the comic book Joker has no secret identity, no confirmable past prior to the incident that turned him green-haired and chalk-white, and, for his first decade of publication, no origin at all. "Sometimes I remember it one way, sometimes another," he tells Batman in Alan Moore's graphic novel *Batman: The Killing Joke*. "If I'm going to have a past, I prefer it to be multiple choice!" Because the Joker does not want Batman to have an alter ego, he threatens the lives of those who might expose the hero's unmasked identity. He does not want to see Batman by daylight. He refuses to recognize any brighter facets of Batman's Persona.

The **Persona** is the mask, essentially a collection of masks the ego wears when interacting with the outer world. You may wear many masks. You bring different set of qualities to different situations, and they all might be equally genuine. The face you wear on Saturday night may not be the face you wear Sunday morning. The Persona helps keep the Shadow hidden. If balance between the two breaks down, a Persona-dominated person will worry too much what people think or a Shadow-dominated person might recognize no law beyond his own instant gratification (Jung, 1949/1961). The Joker hates the nice, bright masks people wear. He strives to smash masks, trying to unleash people's Shadow selves on the assumption they are all monstrous at heart.

After the client faces those features of the personal unconscious, a Jungian therapist helps the person look at deeper aspects of the collective unconscious, beginning with the contrasexual archetypes, each gender's innate sense of the opposite sex. Jung said every man carries an archetypal representation of woman, his **Anima**, and each woman carries one of man, her **Animus**. He said each gender has a sense of what it would mean for the two to join as soul-mates, a divine couple in a relationship called the **Syzygy**, named for alignment of the planets. Batman's attraction to Catwoman, established when he lets her escape in her first appearance even though he has "nice girl" Julie Madison in his life at the time (*Batman* #1, 1940), hints at his Animus nature. Because he thinks of Batman as his true self, he desires a woman more like his Shadow than with his Persona, but because he is more than merely Shadow, he can never fully trust her or keep any woman continuously in his personal life. The Golden Age Batman and Catwoman had to retire from crime fighting and crime respectively before they could balance their complex nature and spend most of their remaining years as a happy couple (*DC Super Stars* #17, 1977).

The maturing individual encounters representations of all the archetypes while progressing toward wholeness of being. The **Self** is the archetype of the individual's greatest potential, where all aspects come together as one. The **Hero** story archetype reflects the individuating person making that trek from balancing Shadow and Persona to become, eventually, possibly, the Self.

### The Hero's Journey

Elaborating upon Jung's writings on heroes, Joseph Campbell (1904-1987) referred to the **Monomyth**, the **Hero's Journey**, as the archetypal myth at the foundation of every heroic tale (Campbell, Cousineau, & Brown, 1990). In *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), he described the steps heroes tend to take:

- *departure*, meaning the separation from their early lives (Wayne's parents get murdered, Bruce leaves Gotham);
- *initiation*, a series of trials that lead to achievement of the ultimate boon, the goal of that hero's quest (Bruce trains under many teachers until ready to don cape and cowl);
- *return*, coming back to bestow his boon upon others (Batman comes to Gotham).

Having gained wisdom, skills, and any other divine gifts, the hero returns to become a master of two worlds. Comics scholar Peter Coogan (2006, p. 122) has observed that the entire journey takes place within the hero's origin story: "The classical monomyth, identified by Joseph Campbell, clearly serves as a model for the origin stories of superheroes."

"Batman: Year One" (*Batman* #404-407, 1987) and *Batman Begins* offer glimpses into that journey, if only its first and final parts. Aside from their brief origin stories, the most prominent superheroes' adventures rarely explore many steps within the monomythic arc – the television program *Smallville* a notable exception in its portrayal of young Clark Kent growing into his Superman role. Batman is a hero complete. As if to satisfy the inherent craving for tales of becoming heroes, the creators added a hero *incomplete*, a student for Batman to mentor, a Boy Wonder who will grow up (*Detective Comics* #38, 1940).



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Image caption: His parents' murder stays in Batman's head. *Detective Comics* #457 cover by Dick Giordano © DC Comics, used with permission.

### Case File 10-2: Dr. Fredric Wertham

**Real name:** Fredric Wertham (originally Wertheimer), M.D.

**First appearance:** Munich, Germany (March 20, 1895).

**Is Batman Gay?**

No.

**Is Robin Gay?**

No.

**But What About...?**

No. To those who read the stories as written, these questions might seem stupid – in which case the greater question might be why people keep asking. That greater question could ignite considerable and fascinating debate while remaining objectively unanswerable. Comic book writer Alan Grant, one of numerous interviewees Silver Bullet Comics once surveyed regarding Batman's sexuality (Donald, n. d.), said, "In my 40 years as a Batman reader, that question never occurred to me. Then, during my time as writer on the Batman titles, I was interviewed for an American college rag. The first question was 'Is Batman gay?' Well, the Batman I wrote for 13 years is not gay. Denny O'Neil's Batman, Marv Wolfman's Batman, everybody's Batman all the way back to Bob Kane – none of them wrote him as a gay character." *The Dark Knight Returns* author Frank Miller (Sharrett, 1991, p. 38) has said, "Batman is not gay. His sexual urges are so drastically sublimated into crime-fighting that there's no *room* for any other emotional activity. Notice how insipid are the stories where Batman has a girlfriend or some sort of romance. It is not because he's gay, but because he's borderline pathological, he's obsessive. He would be *much* healthier if he were gay." DC Comics stories consistently present the Batman-Robin relationship as that of father and son, master and apprentice, mentor and mentee. Readers over the years have had fun pulling examples out of context, like a panel in which twin beds look like the same bed shared by both characters (*Batman* #84, 1954), but consider this: If we could generate over a hundred thousand panel images from your life, assorted snapshots displayed out of context, are not there more than a few we could misinterpret in wildly creative ways?

Popular discussion of the Caped Crusader's sexual orientation started with psychiatrist Dr. Fredric Wertham who authored studies on homicide, helped pioneer courtrooms' use of expert witnesses in forensic psychiatry, provided information that helped the Supreme Court end school desegregation (*Brown v. Board of Education*), judged comic books to be the root of mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century juvenile delinquency, and shook the comic magazine industry to its foundation. Wertham studied under eminent psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, worked with Adolf Meyer, and met with Sigmund Freud, all of whom exerted powerful influence over him – even though he ignored Freud's personal recommendation to keep psychiatry out of the popular press (Wertham, n. d.). A social reformer who fought for civil rights, Wertham immigrated to the United States after World War I and made his name as a consulting psychiatrist for the New

York court system. His psychiatric clinic was among the first to provide mental hygiene examinations for all convicted felons, and his recommendations led to modernization of many facilities and their methods. A charitable mental health clinic Wertham established in Harlem became “the most successful in the nation to provide psychotherapy for the underprivileged...the only center in the city where both Negroes and whites may receive extended psychiatric care” (Ellison, 1953/1964). Known in Harlem as “Doctor Quarter” for the nominal fee he charged to encourage responsibility rather than administer service completely for free, Wertham kept this clinic open for about a decade, during which time he studied how segregation affected children and developed his ideas on how comic books, especially horror comics, cultivated juvenile delinquency.

In the course of his work with juvenile offenders, Wertham noted how avidly delinquents read comic books and how excitedly they described the sometimes gory content (often in response to Wertham’s leading questions). Because the delinquents had all read comic books, Wertham concluded that the comics exerted unhealthy influence. One of the many flaws in this reasoning is that Wertham did not measure them against a **control group** (comparison group) of non-delinquents, and the greater flaw being that he did not systematically collect enough quantitative measurements. In the 1940s and early ‘50s when he made these observations, every delinquent child would also have seen baseball games (as would the non-delinquents), so why not blame baseball? After a child breaks into a meat market so his companions will reward him with comic books and candy, why does Wertham (1954, p. 148) blame the comic books instead of that wicked candy? Hardly the first to criticize comic books but surely the most influential, Wertham started shaking things up with a 1948 *Saturday Review of Literature* article and grew increasingly more vocal, giving lectures and writing more articles over the next seven years, culminating with his famous book *Seduction of the Innocent* in 1954. During hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, Wertham testified, “I think Hitler was a beginner compared to the comic book industry” (Hajdu, 2008).

*Seduction of the Innocent* focused on horror and crime comics, devoting only a small portion of the book to superheroes, but in that small portion lies some of the book’s most famous content. Wertham called Superman a fascist, scoffed at letting children read stories which “teach them the Green Lantern will help” save them (p. 237), said Batman and Robin lived a homosexual fantasy lifestyle, and called Wonder Woman (p. 192) the “Lesbian counterpart of Batman.” He never called Batman and Robin gay. He said (pp. 189-190) their lifestyle was *like* “a wish dream of two homosexuals living together.” Wertham inferred a homoerotic subtext the characters’ creators never intended, a charge as easily leveled against other popular stories about men sharing adventures with their fellow men (e.g., war movies, cowboy movies, Three Musketeers, Three Stooges). “Only someone ignorant of the fundamentals of psychiatry and the psychopathology of sex can fail to realize a subtle atmosphere of homoeroticism which pervades the adventures of the mature ‘Batman’ and his young friend ‘Robin’.” These Freudian fundamentals to which he refers, *especially* early psychoanalytic views on the psychopathology of sex, remain controversial among a majority of psychological professionals and inadequately supported by empirical study (Fisher &

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Greenberg, 1996; McCullough, 2001; Mills, 2005). “At home they lead an idyllic life,” Wertham said of the lifestyle Bruce Wayne and Dick Grayson enjoy, “in sumptuous quarters, with beautiful flowers in large vases, and have a butler, Alfred.” “To avoid being thought queer by Wertham,” Andy Medhurst (1991, p. 151), like others, suggests that Bruce and Dick needed to “never show concern if the other is hurt, live in a shack, only have ugly flowers in small vases, call the butler ‘Chip’ or ‘Joe’ if you have to have one at all, never share a couch, keep your collar buttoned up, keep your jacket on, and never, ever wearing a dressing gown.”

Wertham complained about villains taking Robin hostage, not because that depicted child endangerment (which would have been a valid concern about Batman’s relationship with Robin), but instead because he found something inherently sexual in the act of rescuing one’s friends – a staple in adventure stories through any medium. Just as he says, “They constantly rescue each other from violent attacks by an unending number of enemies. The feeling is conveyed that we men must stick together because there are so many villainous creatures who have to be exterminated,” when describing how “the Batman type of story helps to fixate homoerotic tendencies,” he complains (p. 193) that “Where Batman is anti-feminine, the attractive Wonder Woman and her friends are definitely anti-masculine. Wonder Woman has her own female following. They are all continuously threatened, captured, almost put to death. There is a great deal of mutual rescuing, the same type of rescue fantasies as in Batman.”

Dismissing strong good girl characters like intrepid reporter Vicki Vale, Wertham (p. 191) carped, “In these stories there are practically no decent, attractive, successful women. A typical female character is the Catwoman, who is vicious and uses a whip. The atmosphere is homosexual and anti-feminine. If the girl is good-looking she is undoubtedly the villainess.” Some truth may hover in there, for reasons other than Wertham’s perceived homosexual subtext. Bob Kane distrusted women. Batman’s creator, who enjoyed dating women like Marilyn Monroe, did not know how to befriend them. “You always need to keep a woman at arm’s length. We don’t want anyone to take over our souls, and women have a habit of doing that,” Kane said in his autobiography (Kane & Andrae, 1989, p. 108). “With women, when the romance is over, somehow they never remain my friends.”

By paving the way for the creation of the Comics Code Authority as a tool for the comic book industry to regulate its own content, a code Wertham himself neither supported nor endorsed as he objected to censorship and felt pessimistic about the comic book companies’ ability to regulate themselves, Wertham’s campaign for parents to take responsibility and supervise their children’s reading got Catwoman evicted from the comics for more than a decade. Never mind the whip – that, she could have gone without. The code, by forbidding suggestive postures, demanded realistic drawings of women with no exaggeration of any physical qualities, banned glamorous or sympathetic criminals, and required punishment for all crime every time, left little room for the sexy thief who steals Batman’s heart.

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### Biographical Sketch

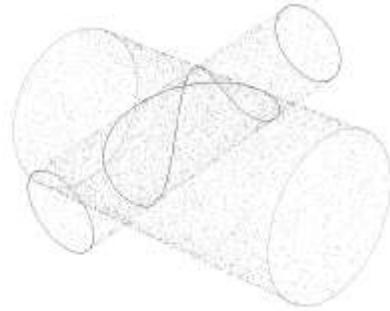
Superherologist Travis Langley, professor of psychology, teaches on the psychology of crime, mental illness, social behavior, and media. He received his bachelor's degree from Hendrix College and his doctorate in psychology from Tulane University. An organizer of the Comics Arts Conference, he regularly speaks as a panelist discussing the psychology of superheroes at conventions such as San Diego Comic-Con International, WonderCon, and New York Comic Con. As part of their ongoing ERIICA Project (Empirical Research on the Interpretation and Influence of the Comic Arts), Dr. Langley and his students investigate how fans see themselves and their heroes. Travis has also been a child abuse investigator, courtroom

expert, and undefeated champion on the *Wheel of Fortune* game show even though none of the puzzles they gave him were about psychology or superheroes.

## Intersecting Cylinders

**Michael Lloyd, PhD.**  
**Professor of Mathematics**

The accompanying picture shows the intersection of two right, circular cylinders. The idea to find a nice algebraic representation for this apparently complicated curve in space was brought to my attention by Fred Worth, whose son was interested in this question from an engineering standpoint.

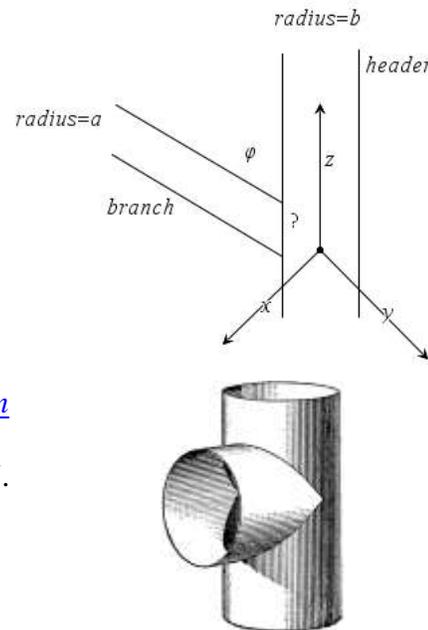


Source: <http://virtualmathmuseum.org/SpaceCurves/2cylinders/2cylinders.html>

Refer to the accompanying diagram for the symbols used in this paper. Assume without loss of generality that the radii of the cylinders are  $a$  and  $b$  and that  $0 < a \leq b$ . Also, assume without loss of generality that the

angle between the cylinders is  $\phi$  where  $0 < \phi \leq \pi/2$ . My student, Kyle Walsh, brought the pipe-fitting terminology of *branch* and *header* to my attention. (The header is generally larger than the branch.)

The intersection for  $\phi = \pi/2$  is derived in Gray, A. [\*Modern Differential Geometry of Curves and Surfaces with Mathematica, 2nd ed.\*](#) Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 1997. To derive the intersection for arbitrary  $\phi$ , start with equations of cylinders with axes parallel to the  $x$  and  $z$  axes, respectively. Note that one of the axes of the cylinders will not intersect if offset  $h$  is not zero.



Source:  
[http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/62200/62244/62244\\_planecyl.htm](http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/62200/62244/62244_planecyl.htm)

$$\begin{cases} (y-h)^2 + z^2 = a^2 \\ x^2 + y^2 = b^2 \end{cases}$$

Let  $R(v, \phi)$  be the positive rotation about the positive  $y$ -axis, and use the linear transformation to get the initial system whose solution is the desired intersection curve.