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Holy Intertextual Identity Conditions, Batman!

By

Peter Dobozy

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EXAMINING COMMITTEE

Bernard Linsky, Department of Philosophy

Amy Schmitter, Department of Philosophy

Phil Corkum, Department of Philosophy

Albert Braz, Department of Interdisciplinary Studies

ABSTRACT

Fictional characters pose interesting questions both to metaphysics and philosophy of language. We appear to have two incompatible intuitions about fictional characters: 1) fictional characters are created and 2) fictional characters are nonexistent. To say something is created is to say that it *exists*. However, to say that fictional characters are nonexistent, suggests that they are not created. Various theories attempt to explain the ontological status of fictional characters based on one of these intuitions. Once a theory is adopted, a subsequent concern is how that theory might identify individual fictional characters. I investigate two such proposals that are based on our second intuition. I argue that these attempts are uncharitably criticized because they have not been fully developed. I develop these attempts further to show how they can withstand previous criticisms. However, in doing so, I expose other problems faced by these attempts that appears to genuinely lead to their demise.

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CHAPTER 1: FICTIONAL CHARACTERS

1.0 Fictional Characters

Fictional characters are a much stranger breed of entity than one might initially suspect. Consider how one might intuitively answer the following question: what is a fictional character? Intuitive answers include all sorts of vague and synonymous jargon such as "a fabrication of the author's mind," "a creation of the author" "made up," "does not exist" and so forth. The inquisitive, however, would quickly realize that such jargon is problematic. For instance, how can we say *there are* such things as fictional characters, if *they are not* supposed to exist? Similarly, how can we say that an author *created* an entity, which is simultaneously *nonexistent*? How can something, which does not exist, *have* properties? Furthermore, how are assertions about such entities true or false, especially when considered within the context of the *real, existent* world? These are but a few of the questions to trouble the ontology of fictional characters. As such, our intuitive answers no longer appear so intuitive.

Regrettably, these questions are without definitive answers. However, of the many noble efforts made to answer these questions, some certainly show more promise than others. An assessment of several of these efforts will be the first objective of my thesis. My motivation for doing so, however, is to understand the parameters required to investigate another equally compelling question: how do we identify individual fictional characters? More specifically, how can we identify fictional characters "intertextually"[1] i.e., from one story to the next? The answer is not as obvious as one might think. The reason why it is not so obvious, I believe, is that people far too often fail to consider the more extreme examples

[1] I am importing the terms *intertextual, intratextual* and *extratextual* from Uri Margolin's "Characters and their Versions."

of fictional characters, examples which introduce peculiarities that one might not otherwise consider. One such extreme example is The Batman character.

However, before I begin, I should warn that The Batman character is philosophically valuable for many reasons, reasons that are well beyond the scope of my investigation and certainly of a quantity greater than what I can afford to address. The first and most relevant peculiarity of The Batman character is the excessively large quantity of literature[2] that is the product of seventy years worth of publications. Such a large quantity of publications has produced the "occasional" inconsistency that correlates The Batman with a contradictory set of properties. However, part of this inconsistency is also due to the fact that the aggregate literature or "Bat-catalogue" is not intended to be one large intertwined story. Many tales of The Batman are what I will call "tangents," deliberately self-contained, largely unrelated and terminal stories, similar to how the episodes of The Twilight Show operated. Such an unusually large number of publications are also accompanied by an unusually large number of authors and artists or "creative teams."[3] In effect, each creative team provides a unique interpretation of the character. Moreover, some creative teams have made seminal contributions that have altered the direction and style of subsequent stories. Others, while less influential, have nevertheless provided very unique interpretations that deviate considerably from what might be perceived as the "main body" of literature. These peculiarities, among many others, serve to question whether it is reasonable to maintain that it is indeed the same Batman character in the many publications or whether these peculiarities have resulted in a "Bat-fission" and consequently produced a plurality of "Batmen," or many distinct fictional characters.

[2] I am unsure whether the comic book medium would qualify as "literature." I am inclined to say no, but this debate is irrelevant to my thesis.

[3] A creative team refers to the various people involved in the creation of a comic book which usually involves an author, artist or penciller, inker, colourer, letterer, editor and so forth.

Again, the first goal of my thesis is to consider several of the theories that attempt to explain the ontology of fictional characters, namely, Meinongian, Possible Objects, Abstraction and Creationism. Once these theories are thoroughly examined, we will have the parameters necessary to consider how they could develop identity conditions for fictional characters both within a text (intratextual) and across multiple texts (intertextual). Following this, I will attempt to expose the full complexity of The Batman character in order to demonstrate the arduous task that lies ahead for such theories, not to mention, myself. Finally, I will examine two Meinongian based solutions that attempt to account for intertextual identity and the reasons for their supposed failure. However, my reason for doing so is that I believe these Meinongian attempts were unjustly criticized, even if they remain unviable solutions. Hence, I would like to fortify these Meinongian based attempts with some amendments and additional considerations.

1.1 Challenging Our Intuitions

We begin by challenging our two most basic and apparently incompatible intuitions about fictional characters: 1) fictional characters are *created* and 2) fictional characters are *nonexistent*. Naturally, to say that a fictional character is created is to imply that there is a moment at which it is made to exist and prior to which it did not exist. Conversely, to say that a fictional character does not exist is to imply that it cannot be created and if so, then something fundamentally different transpires during the "creative act." As Takashi Yagisawa claims in "Against Creationism in Fiction," "...it is an undeniable conceptual, indeed (I dare say) analytic, truth that for any x, if x is created, x comes into existence."[4] If what is created does indeed exist, then the residual problem is to make sense of our *created* entity's ontological status, in order to reconcile our conflicting intuitions or possibly to reject our

[4] Yagisawa, Takashi. "Against Creationism in Fiction," pg. 157

second intuition altogether. Moreover, once created, are there circumstances under which a fictional character could cease to exist? Or, does the creative act somehow include Platonic benefits, such as eternal subsistence?

In light of this difficulty, some would have us pervert what it means *to exist* in order to clear up the confusion. For instance, John Searle's work, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," argues that fictional characters are created, but exist only *within* fiction, "Holmes and Watson never existed at all, which is not of course to deny that they exist in fiction."[5] Searle's claim seems to hint that there may be types of existence and that they admit of degrees, some *more real* than others. However, to accept Searle's claim is then likely to require that we similarly pervert what it means *to create*. For instance, we often talk about creation in a biblical sense or creation in a sperm and egg sense, and so correspondingly, a sense catered to fiction. However, these other senses of creation refer to things that we commonly agree *exist;* the universe and people exist whereas fictional characters, we intuitively maintain, do not. Moreover, such a manipulation is likely to render my discussion of fictional characters both circular and also rather uninteresting.

To the contrary, Peter van Inwagen argues in "Fiction and Metaphysics" and also in "Creatures of Fiction," that the word existence is univocal (unequivocal). There is no fundamental distinction between a fictional character's existence and my existence. Consider sentences that make existential or quantificational claims such as "*there is* someone who likes me" or "*there exists* at least one person (I hope) who likes me." Both of these sentences produce equivalent assertions; both purport the existence of at least one individual who holds a particular relation to me. Similarly, the sentences "*there are* fictional characters," and "fictional characters *exist*" are, in fact, semantically equivalent. Van Inwagen suggests that

[5] Searle, John. "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," pg. 329

part of our discomfort with such assertions as "fictional characters *exist,*" is that the term *exists* has somehow mistakenly come to be more ontologically demanding, "...anyone who uses it takes on a great weight of ontological responsibility."[6] Thus, despite the semantic equivalence, our comfort appears to reside with more passive aggressive paraphrases such as "*there are* such entities as fictional characters" or "*some* fictional characters..." as opposed to the explicit and supposedly high maintenance alternative, "fictional characters *exist*."

The introduction of mild paraphrases and weaker notions of existence such as mind-dependent existence, existence in fiction and so forth, appears to me as nothing more than some sort of semantic pragmatism designed to ignore rather than address the difficulty. If *existence* is univocal and not qualitative, then a fictional character's existence is no different than my existence and should not necessarily be devalued simply because its existence is dependent on someone's brain activity and/or copy of a text. Similarly, my existence is not necessarily of any greater value in virtue of my dependence on protein and oxygen. Consequently, the only prudence I can see in distinguishing types of existence, is in order to discuss existential dependency—on what a particular object might depend to exist. However, this does not entail that we should rank types of existence; each of the so called types of existence ultimately affirms that the object under investigation exists.

Naturally, we must also indulge our second intuition that fictional characters are nonexistent. What exactly does this entail? At the very least, we want to maintain something to the effect that fictional characters lack a spatiotemporal location or are not "concrete"[7] objects. For instance, if I go looking for The Batman, I will not find him in any

[6] Van Inwagen. "Creatures of Fiction," pg. 302

[7] The term concrete is not without some confusion. Unfortunately, I cannot spend the time to critically address the matter. I will use the term "concrete" to refer to objects located in space and time. I import the term primarily to represent the distinction between the concrete and the abstract as understood in its most basic and intuitive sense, regardless of what is precisely entailed by the distinction and what any counterexamples may demonstrate. Problems with the distinction between the concrete and the abstract can be found in David Lewis' *On The Plurality of Worlds*, pp. 81-86.

spatiotemporal location (although some are of the opinion that you do not find The Batman, The Batman finds you). Regardless, we can describe, refer to, and apparently give true and false information about fictional characters similar to how we have so far managed with concrete people. On the other hand, we also want to maintain that fictional characters are not concrete people, i.e., that there is presently no one in our universe that fits the description or goes by the name of the fictional character in question. Moreover, for reasons we will soon consider, it appears as though fictional characters could never be concrete people, or more precisely, are not possible objects.

However, there is another problem with asserting that fictional characters are spatiotemporally challenged. There are other peculiar entities such as numbers, universals and theories,[8] which we are inclined to believe exist, in spite of their spatiotemporal shortcomings. The resulting dilemma is whether or not to classify fictional characters along with the more traditionally labelled abstracta. However, such abstracta are not commonly thought to be *created*, at least, not in the way that we believe fictional characters are created. For instance, numbers are typically considered eternal, having *existed* well before the dawn of intelligent beings and will probably continue to do so well after our dusk. Nevertheless, if we wish to maintain that fictional characters are nonexistent or, at least, spatiotemporally deficient, then it is only fair to provide our first intuition, that fictional characters are created, with a more formidable adversary.

[8] By theory I mean what might be called natural laws, such as the law of gravity.

1.2 A Meinongian Account of Fictional Characters

In order to challenge our intuition about authorship, we must consider other avenues by which to explain a fictional character's ontological status. One such avenue is a Meinongian account of fictional characters. Crudely put, the Meinongian perspective holds that *to exist* is a predicate. As a result, we can discuss a nonexistent object's properties or association with a specific bundle of properties, as we would do with any concrete object, despite that the object does not exist or, more appropriately, lacks the property of existence. One Meinongian account is offered by Terrence Parsons' work, *Nonexistent Objects*. Parsons' Meinongian account begins with two assumptions: 1) that every concrete object is correlated with a particular combination of properties and 2) that each concrete object is distinct, such that no two concrete objects can have precisely the same bundle of properties. For instance, we could distinguish two otherwise identical cans of coke by their respective spatiotemporal locations, the specific times each was manufactured and so forth.

Now suppose that we attempt to create an exhaustive list of all concrete objects, along with their associated bundle of properties. The compilation of this list would invariably encounter such problematic cases as objects that did exist, will exist, could exist or could not exist.[9] If all, or even just some, of our exceptions should make the list, then the list will be infinitely larger than the list of combinations *presently* correlated with concrete objects. Nonetheless, each possible and impossible bundle in our extended list is correlated with an object, albeit a *presently* nonexistent one. One might then conclude that these objects simply lack the property of existence. Any considerations as to the whereabouts or ontological privileges enjoyed by nonexistent objects, are, fortunately, well beyond the scope of my

[9] During the undertaking of such a task, many objects would presumably cease to exist, come into existence, etc.

thesis.[10] What remains within my scope, however, is whether or not Parsons' account could provide the foundation upon which to build intertextual identity conditions for fictional characters.

First, given the presuppositions inherent in Parsons' account, and in all Meinongian accounts, it is imperative that we abandon the term *creation*. Obviously, if fictional characters remain nonexistent and we want to maintain a univocal definition of existence, then they certainly cannot be *created*. Moreover, the Meinongian position appears to possess other qualities that are common to the more traditionally labelled abstracta. If *there are* nonexistent objects and their bundles of properties are determined independently of and prior to any Homo Sapien contamination, then they are also eternal entities. Consequently, to discuss fictional characters as created within the Meinongian perspective is dangerously misleading. If we wish to defend the Meinongian perspective, then we are better off to speak of fictional characters as introduced or activated in such and such a text, performance, or composition by so and so an author(s), performer(s) or composer(s). In Parsons' own words,

> It does not mean, for example, that the author brings those characters into existence, for they do not exist. Nor does he or she make them objects, for they were objects before they appeared in stories. We might say I suppose, that the author makes them fictional objects, and that they were not fictional before the creative act. We might even say that the author bestows on them fictional existence, as long as this is not confused with ordinary existence.[11],[12]

Similarly, another Meinongian account, presented by Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Works and Worlds of Art*, an account which will feature extensively in Chapter Two, refers to the creative process as the author simply denoting a particular person-kind,

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[10] Such a position will require a different interpretation for "there are" and "exist" if the Meinongian is to say "there are" such things as nonexistent objects; another issue that I cannot afford to critically assess. Van Inwagen's "Creatures of Fiction," devotes some consideration to the issue, pp. 299-300.

[11] Parsons, Terence. *Nonexistent Objects,* pg. 188

[12] It is rather unfortunate that Parsons includes this last suggestion. It appears that Parsons, like Searle, believes that fictional characters could exist *within* fiction, invoking the qualitative sense of existence. This is also a source of contention in Searle's account and the Creationist perspective, which I will discuss at length.

> But to be thus creative is not to bring the character into existence…From the infinitude of person-kinds the author selects one. His creativity lies in the freshness, the imaginativeness, the originality of his selection, rather than in his bringing into existence what did not before exist.[13]

Returning to Parsons' account, a fictional character is categorized as either native or immigrant. A native fictional character is one original to or first activated[14] in the work under investigation. An immigrant fictional character is one that either has previously appeared elsewhere, as a native fictional character in another story or is a character assumed to be familiar to most, if not all, the readers.[15] A fictional character's properties are classified as either nuclear or extranuclear. Parsons' definitions of nuclear and extranuclear are a little peculiar, but no less intuitively motivated. A property is nuclear "if everyone agrees that the predicate stands for an ordinary property of individuals."[16] Nuclear properties are then simple and non-contentious properties such as redness, amphibiousness and so forth. Extranuclear properties are properties which carry some controversial baggage, "if everyone agrees that it doesn't stand for an ordinary property of individuals (for whatever reason), or if there is a history of controversy about whether it stands for a property of individuals."[17] Extranuclear properties will include such examples as exists, being feared by, being thought of and so forth. A fictional character's intratextual identity is then simply determined by the description offered by the text, "native fictional objects have exactly the nuclear properties that we are naively inclined to apply to them."[18]

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[13] Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Works and Worlds of Art,* pg. 145

[14] I cannot think of what term might best suit the creative process under a Meinongian account. Activate, select, introduce, discover (Amie Thomasson's preferred nomenclature) and denote all have different meanings but capture some important aspect of what this process is likely to entail. Regardless, I will use the word "activated" for the most part, but more importantly, to contrast with the term "created" and the Creationist perspective.

[15] It is worth noting that immigrant characters do not necessarily have to be fictional. Concrete objects such as people or places are commonly imported into fictional stories and under Parsons' view are also labelled immigrant characters.

[16] Parsons, Terence. *Nonexistent Objects,* pg. 24

[17] Ibid. pg. 24

[18] Ibid. pg. 54

The immediate concern with Parsons' suggestion for intratextual identity is that any given work will contain not just one central protagonist or antagonist, but technically, many. For instance, as a story unfolds, more and more is described of the various characters such that each character's description invariably undergoes some degree of modification either through the addition, deletion or substitution of nuclear properties. What the Meinongian perspective entails, however, is that each separate detailing of a character also represents a distinct nonexistent object, one that is correlated only with the properties of that particular description. Consequently, each fictional character, which was previously thought of as one character, could, in fact, be a set of related, but distinct characters. To evade this implication, Parsons suggests that a fictional character's identity is determined by the total number of nuclear properties explicitly described by the story's end, what he designates the "maximal account,"

> The account is modified and expanded during the reading, and the final result may be called the maximal account. Then what is true in the story is just whatever the maximal account explicitly says, and nothing else.[19]

I believe the best way to understand Parsons' maximal account is to think of all the nuclear properties correlated with the fictional character as determined prior to the onset of the story. The modification or *change* endured by a fictional character is not a literal change but rather a steady disclosure of pre-*existing* information as it becomes relevant to the story. I believe this point is crucial to a Meinongian solution. Presumably, if nonexistent objects are abstract and eternal, then they are also static entities that, unlike their concrete counterparts, cannot undergo any change whatsoever. The nonexistent object that is activated by the author is then the one represented by the maximal account. The author is technically not responsible for, nor should be credited with, the activation of the nonexistent objects that

[19] Ibid pg. 175

are represented by each individual description. In fact, the nonexistent objects that are represented by the individual descriptions technically do not even *appear* in the story. The earlier descriptions of the character, found in previous chapters and pages, are simply part of the maximal account, despite also representing distinct nonexistent objects. Consequently, it might be more appropriate to think of fictional discourse as operating like an historical work, or a type of retrospective; each property and event correlated with the character is determined prior to and independently of any textual manifestation. We should, however, not dismiss the significance of the textual manifestations, since they remain the primary source by which to identify the particular nonexistent object that is represented by the fictional character.

As such, any so called *change* in a fictional character's properties is likely to correlate three properties with the character: 1) the initial property, 2) the property of undergoing the specific change and 3) the resulting property. Consider when a fictional character is described as aging. The fictional character will have the property of being age X, the property of enduring the time between age X and age X+N and the property of being the age X+N. This formulation allows a fictional character to be intratextually described as undergoing change, although, theoretically, this is not what takes place. Lastly, properties, which the story does not explicitly state of a character, are neither true nor false, but are considered indeterminate,[20] regardless of whether they could be safely derived or assumed from the nuclear properties which are explicitly stated.[21]

In spite of our first intuition that fictional characters are *created* entities, Parsons' Meinongian account remains an attractive foundation for intertextual identity conditions.

[20] If it is indeterminate whether or not The Batman has an ingrown toenail, then it is neither true nor false but rather lacks a truth value. Consequently, it would appear that fictional characters are exempt from certain laws of logic.

[21] If a character is human, one could safely assume that the character has a specific blood type.

First, it maintains that fictional characters are nonexistent, which allows us to uphold our second intuition about fictional characters. Second, the supposed incompatibility between our two intuitions, that fictional characters are both *created* and *nonexistent,* is no longer so; the term *created* is simply an inappropriate paraphrase of the term *activated* and a paraphrase that has mistakenly come to suffer the wrath of the literal interpretation. Third, Parsons' account allows us to determine the identity of a fictional character simply by the good word of the text. And lastly, rather than claiming that fictional characters *have* properties (by which they are described), we should instead claim that fictional characters are *correlated* with properties. Whatever the exact metaphysical features of this relation, I assume it is a relation intended to be weaker than what is entailed by predication and one which permits us to discuss nonexistent objects as *having* properties, even though most of us are inclined to believe that such properties are exclusively possessed by concrete objects.

Unfortunately, Parsons does not offer any criteria by which to account for the intertextual exploits of fictional characters. Fortunately, his account does contain the bedrock upon which to do so. Assuming that we can expand Parsons' maximal account to include multiple works, then there is hope for developing intertextual identity conditions. The main conceptual worry with doing so will be the rigidity of a fictional character's properties which makes the very notion of a sequel problematic. Nevertheless, for better or worse, I will attempt to construct such a solution in the next chapter.

1.3 Universals, Types, and Job Descriptions

Given the aforementioned complexities, and the many yet to come, another thought to entertain is whether fictional characters such as The Batman, and many other comic book characters, can and do operate similar to universals. The hope is to accommodate the various "Batmen" while, in effect, maintaining that they are the same character.

Before I assess the groundwork for our "Bat-universal," I must introduce several other "Bat-idiosyncrasies" that further provoke such a consideration. It is often the subject of intra/intertextual debate as to whether The Batman and Bruce Wayne are the same or distinct. Unfortunately, the psychological component of dual identities is well beyond the scope of my thesis, but there remains much within my scope to consider. Intra/intertextually, the exploration of The Batman as a symbol, influence or occupation is often a central and reoccurring theme in the Bat-catalogue. Chapter Two informs us of several of these idiosyncrasies. First, Bruce Wayne was not always the sole occupant of The Batman designation. Second, Bruce Wayne has often referred to The Batman in the third person, primarily due to The Batman's occupational and symbolic status (and only secondarily due to his suspected psychosis). Lastly, the DC Multiverse[22] or DCU was/is filled with parallel universes, the majority of which contain their own Bruce Wayne/The Batman counterpart. In light of these idiosyncrasies, the statement "Bruce Wayne *is* The Batman" becomes rather oblique. For instance, this could mean 1) that Bruce Wayne and The Batman are indeed the same person/fictional character or 2) that Bruce Wayne presently fills the role or holds the title of The Batman, similar to how Barack Obama presently holds the title of President. To think of The Batman as a fictional occupation rather than a strict fictional character will result in the separation of the fictional man behind the mask—Bruce Wayne, from the cape and cowl—The Batman, and afford other fictional characters the opportunity to be The Batman or, at the very least, represent a sort of (weak

[22] Multiverse is a name used to refer to any number of possible or parallel universes in addition to our own, the aggregate of which is meant to comprise all of "existence." Since DC Comics is the name of the publisher that owns and produces the various Batman stories, the setting for all DC publications is commonly referred to as the DC universe or DCU. However, despite that the majority of the stories published take place within the "New Earth Universe" there are tales told within various other parallel universes such as "Earth 2," "Earth 3" and the occasional traveling and interaction between the characters of the various universes. Furthermore, given my future discussion about the possibility of multiple "Batmen" it is better that I make this clarification sooner rather than later.

and poor) substitute.[23] If so, such a consideration will heavily influence both the framework and content of any proposed solution.

There are also "extratextual" motivations to develop a Bat-universal. Extratextual motivations include such things as the aforementioned psychological component of dual identities, cultural, sociological and economic variables. For instance, with the passage of time and a remarkably persistent level of popularity, The Batman has evolved beyond a simple fictional character to become a sort of pop culture icon or artefact,[24] (not to mention massive cash cow). Consequently, The Batman now *exists* in many other mediums such as films, toys/figurines, video games, and television. Moreover, the passage of time has ingrained The Batman with a certain style or set of ideas, such that The Batman becomes a metaphor for other fictional characters, or other fictional characters are described as Batman-like.[25] There are also the many stylistic epochs,[26] which are interesting not only in regards to how the character has evolved, but also in regards to how they represent and are influenced by sociological, historical and cultural events. One such example was the advent of censorship with the introduction of the Comics Code Authority (CCA) in 1954.[27] The introduction of censorship was initially so restrictive that the content of comics became

[23] Whether or not these instances of other fictional characters assuming the role of The Batman is still The Batman proper we will consider in chapter two. I am inclined to say no, but presently not for philosophical reasons.

[24] I do not intend that people may one day question whether such a person existed, but rather the fictional character somehow transcends its strictly fictional characteristics. To some extent this has already happened given the various mediums in which The Batman appears and The Batman's popularity.

[25] I want to distinguish these types from the aforementioned substitute/variation. In the former I mean to say characters that are called The Batman and have some claim to being The Batman. By the latter, I imply characters that only metaphorically represent The Batman possibly not even intentionally. The idea is that a certain style or idea becomes so ingrained in the character that we use that character when we want to associate a certain style or set of ideas with another character. For example, the films Apocalypse Now and Aguirre: Wrath of God are both representative of Joseph Conrad's Novella, *Heart of Darkness,* but only in theme and with many elements altered.

[26] The stylistic epochs were, The Golden Age, Silver Age, Bronze Age and Modern Age. There is no consensus on the precise start and end points of these periods, but are approximated by and used primarily to divide the "aesthetic" periods.

[27] A copy of the act can be found in *Comic Book Committee Report* by Bernard, M.L, Biss, C & Lang, I.

nothing more than an exercise in banality. The premise of *Action Comics #241* for instance, is Superman attempting to determine who snuck into his Fortress of Solitude. As it turns out, the culprit is The Batman, who was unsure what to buy Superman for his birthday, so instead, gave him a "puzzle" to solve. Unfortunately, most extratextual considerations cannot feature heavily in my thesis, but, at the very least, deserve an honourable mention. Moreover, once the many extratextual variables are taken into consideration, it is likely to result in an even stranger type of entity, of which the fictional dimension is now a constituent of, rather than the basis for, such an entity.

One possible approach by which to develop a Bat-universal, is prompted by a position held by Richard Wolheim, in *Art and Its Objects*. Of the opinion that certain works of art, such as musical compositions and literary works classify as abstract objects, Wolheim investigates the relationship between the abstract work or "type" and its concrete representations or "tokens." For example, a literary work or a musical composition would qualify as a type while the individual copies of the work or the individual performances of the music would qualify as tokens. Naturally, the relationship between type and its tokens is intended to mirror the relationship held between a universal and its particulars. There is however, one important distinction. Wolheim suggests that a type could operate simultaneously as token,

> for not merely is the type present in all its tokens like the universal in all its instances, but for much of the time we think and talk of the type as though it were itself a kind of token, though a peculiarly important or pre-eminent one.[28]

Wolheim's position is that the relationship between a type and its tokens is more "intimate" than the relationship between universals and particulars. A universal, as an abstraction, cannot exhibit the qualities that are necessarily possessed by its particulars, "no

[28] Wolheim, Richard. *Art and its Objects,* pg. 76

property that an instance of a certain universal has necessarily, i.e. that it has in virtue of being an instance of that universal, can be transmitted to the universal."[29] Consider the relationship between the universal tree or "treeness" and its particulars. The universal treeness is not actually green, brown, coniferous/deciduous or subject to sublimation, which its particulars, in virtue of being particulars, necessarily are. Similarly, any particular tree by itself is not the universal "treeness."

The suggested relationship between types and their tokens on the other hand, is more symmetric, "all and only those properties that a token of a certain type has necessarily, i.e. that it has in virtue of being a token of that type, will be transmitted to the type."[30] I believe the most appropriate way to understand the relationship between type and its token is to consider what is likely to be the best application, the notion of artistic performance or interpretation. Consider the performance (token) of a particular musical composition (type). Given the number of variables, such as tempo, volume and multiple performers, no performance is likely to be perfectly replicated, nor is the composition likely to be performed precisely as it was written. Moreover, many of a composition's elements are often deliberately exaggerated or modified, precisely to provide a different interpretation of the work. However, despite the distinctiveness of each interpretation or performance, each can also said to be *the* work and is, in fact supposed to be *the* work. Hence, each performance is as much *the* musical composition as it is a unique performance.

On the surface, the concept of a type and token nicely captures the notion of interpretation, which features heavily, at least, in the illustrative dimension of the comic book medium. The illustrative depiction of The Batman has evolved much from its initial campy and often absurd costume to the gothic and foreboding, but still rather absurd

[29] Ibid. pg. 77
[30] Ibid. pg. 77

character drawn today. Moreover, each artist, while confined within their epoch's general style, invariably provides a unique interpretation. Thus, if we take our cue from Wolheim, we could say that all of The Batman's interpretations are of the same Batman and simultaneously maintain that The Batman *is* each of the pictorial depictions, despite the many styles and their distinctions. Ideally, if we could extrapolate this concept beyond the illustrative dimension and apply it to the events of the individual stories, such that each story functions as an interpretation, then we have another slab of bedrock upon which to potentially build a solution.

Unfortunately, this is more easily said than done. I presently remain skeptical as to whether this approach is beneficial beyond accommodating the illustrative dimension of The Batman character. First, to properly utilize Wolheim's suggestion would require us to extend the notion of type and token beyond the work to the fictional characters within a work. While I believe this is easily done for characters in a play[31] or possibly even fictional characters appearing in only one work, intertextual considerations represent a much different type of difficulty. Once a fictional character begins to appear in multiple works, then the dynamic and descriptive nature of storytelling further modifies the character. Properties are then added, deleted and replaced, a variable that is not as easily reflected in my example of the musical composition, nor is it necessarily Wolheim's intended application. While the interpretations of a musical composition can vary from the nuanced to the extreme, all tend to maintain an identical structure, at least with respect to the notes.

I am inclined to deny that an interpretation should allow for notes to be added or deleted without producing a distinct composition (as would the Meinongians).[32] Hence,

[31] Insofar as they are represented by different actors when performed live.

[32] I am aware that this may appear contrary to what I have said earlier and it is a difficult position to defend. For instance, one might not necessarily believe that the addition or deletion of one simple note entails that it

interpretations might be fenced in by structural boundaries. Similarly, The Batman, as pictorially represented, is imposed with similar boundaries, such as the costume necessarily having to depict a bat-like creature, having a utility belt and so forth. However, the stories of The Batman are not as structurally confined, if at all. If the descriptive and dynamic features of storytelling and the other non-pictorial elements of the comic book medium are significant to the identity of a fictional character, possibly to a greater degree than the pictorial element, then the subject of interpretation, will, at most, play an auxiliary role.

Consequently, the relationship between a type and its token might aid in our answer to the tangents, but there are other difficulties to which the type/token relationship might be of little to no help. However, greater assessment of this position will have to wait until I have fully explicated the many peculiarities of The Batman character. Furthermore, Wolheim's position is also structurally akin to the intertextual identity conditions proposed by Wolterstorff, again, an account which will feature heavily in Chapter Two. Lastly, while this proposal is attractive for some fictional characters, in particular, comic book characters, many fictional characters do not fall into this subset and so do not face many of the obstacles that warrant such a proposal. On the other hand, given enough time, the possibility remains that any fictional character could eventually adopt all the peculiarities that plague The Batman and the comic book medium. Consequently, we must consider this proposal, if for nothing else than the sake of due diligence.

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is a distinct composition, especially when one considers the possibility of "mistakes" during a live performance. However, while we could argue that tempo and volume are also structural constraints as I suggested with the notes, we could potentially mark a distinction between the composition as it appears on paper and how it is performed live. Moreover, the perception of tempo and volume are often subjective, such as the concert hall in which it is played, number of people in the hall, etc. The addition and deletion of notes, however, is not.

1.4 Possible Objects

The next possibility by which to account for the ontology of fictional characters is to consider whether or not they are possible objects. Initially, we are certainly inclined to think so. For instance, there is no harm to conceive of a possible world that is otherwise identical to ours, with the exception that it also contains a man named Bruce Wayne, who fights crime and preferably while sporting a large bat suit. Moreover, if only some fictional characters are possible objects, The Batman is a more qualified candidate than some of his superhero contemporaries, such as Superman and The Flash.[33]

On the other hand, The Batman is a less qualified candidate in contrast to "ordinary" fictional characters like Dostoevsky's Raskolnikov or Doyle's Holmes. To my knowledge, Raskolnikov appeared in only one work, *Crime and Punishment,* the events of which, by comparison to The Batman's adventures, are relatively mundane. Hence, Raskolnikov's application for possible objectification is much less demanding and certainly more probable than The Batman's. Even Sherlock Holmes, who has appeared in multiple stories, has a far fewer number of properties and events of which a possible object would need predicating.

The Batman, on the other hand, has appeared in thousands of stories, and is predicated with an even larger number of properties. Many of these stories, I might add, involve The Batman performing such extraordinary feats, most of which a possible person could not easily perform, let alone perform all of them. This conviction is only further strengthened when one considers The Batman's residency within the DCU, which hosts all sorts of alien races, parallel universes and super-cosmic events. Of course, we should not confuse possible with probable and despite the improbability, the majority of The Batman's accomplishments remain within the realm of possibility. As it turns out, however, even if we

[33] Insofar as The Batman is a human being, albeit an extraordinary one, but without typical "superpowers" such as The Flash's super-speed or Superman's, pretty much, super-everything.

attempt to identify The Batman with a serviceable and more believable set of properties, limited to, say, the details of one story-arc[34] or a single comic book issue, there is reason, beyond our simple intuitive speculations, to reject The Batman, or any other fictional character for that matter, as a possible object.

The argument against fictional characters as possible objects begins with the fact that fictional characters have an incomplete description. I interpret incompleteness in two senses. First, unlike concrete individuals, fictional characters usually lack a complete physical description. For instance, the appearance of a fictional character in a novel is not typically hampered by such trivial details as foot size, blood type, height and weight. Second, many of a fictional character's past and future endeavours are never described.[35] There are many reasonable excuses for an author to stop short of a comprehensive physical description or an exhaustive biography of a fictional character. For instance, some properties are never detailed simply for their lack of relevance to the plot, or given the structure of some genres, such as mystery or suspense, could undermine the intended effect. Moreover, if we assume that Parsons is correct about such details, then they are indeterminate and are neither true nor false.

Drawing from a fictional character's incomplete physical description, Saul Kripke, in *Naming and Necessity,* provides two arguments in favour of denying fictional characters possible personhood. Kripke's arguments, however, first require a little primer. Kripke

[34] It is often characteristic of comic books to have a story told over several issues. Hence one comic book will often not be one story but a segment or chapter of a larger story told over several issues. This is commonly referred to as a story-arc.

[35] All the literature discussed in my paper appears to take incompleteness in the first sense (insofar as their examples are concerned). I make the distinction because there is a sense in which the physical description, even if not given, is determinate to the extent that the character necessarily has certain properties in virtue of being human. For instance, The Batman is human and has feet so he must have a foot size despite the absence of such details in the comic books (although they probably have been mentioned at some point). The other sense of incomplete would be properties that cannot really be deduced either way such as having a favourite movie, especially if there is no mention of him even liking films to begin with.

argues that names are rigid designators. A name is a rigid designator "if in every possible world it designates the same object."[36] Consider my name, Peter Dobozy. If my name is a rigid designator, then it designates me in every world in which I exist and not someone else. To the contrary, a description of me, such as "the writer of this thesis" is not a rigid designator, since there are many possible worlds in which this fact fails to hold, such as one in which I do not write a thesis, someone other than myself writes this thesis, and so forth. How I came to be designated, Peter Dobozy, was through an initial "baptism" where my parents explicitly or publicly decreed that this is what I would be called. Any subsequent use of my name, whether it is through direct acquaintance or indirectly, through a friend of a friend, or by someone who I have never met will still refer to me, provided there is a chain of communication that ultimately links the user of the name back to me and not someone else who may have coincidentally been baptized with the same name,[37] "a certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to X even though he can't identify him uniquely."[38]

Now let us suppose there are several concrete people, all of whom claim to be The Batman. Worse yet, suppose that each of our suspects has the limited but incomplete description by which we have determined The Batman's identity. Since each suspect is concrete, they necessarily have a *complete* physical description. Beyond the properties that would identify him as The Batman, each suspect has many other properties that were never explicitly correlated with The Batman and are neither true nor false of The Batman. The problem is then to determine which one of our concrete candidates is the real Batman.

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[36] Kripke, Saul. *Naming and Necessity,* pg. 48

[37] Even if two objects happened to be baptized with the exact same name the baptism takes place separately and so a proper chain of communication would help avoid confusion as they would refer back to their respective objects.

[38] Ibid pg. 91

Kripke's first argument, the metaphysical argument, claims that the correct answer is none. Since The Batman lacks a complete physical description, there are technically an infinite number of possible people, all of whom are equally qualified to represent The Batman's incomplete description. Beyond the set of properties by which our possible people qualify as The Batman, there are also an infinite number of possible combinations of the many properties which are determinate of possible people but indeterminate of The Batman. Consequently, we have no means by which to isolate the *real* Batman because we have no means by which to assess all the properties which are determinate of our concrete suspects, but indeterminate of The Batman.

Furthermore, if, for some reason, we find the need to assess what Parsons defined as extranuclear properties, then Kripke's argument is all the more convincing. For instance, would one of our concrete Batmen necessarily require the property of being first thought of or activated by Bob Kane?[39] Alternatively, as I have suggested above, if The Batman is not a rigid designator and denotes many objects, then there is reason to doubt this claim, but please, stay tuned.

Kripke's second argument, the epistemological argument, claims that even if only one individual, individual X, happened to meet the incomplete description of The Batman, there is no way to know whether it was this individual who Bob Kane referred to when he composed his first "Bat-story." First, Bob Kane could not have referred to individual X if Bob Kane was not aware of individual X's existence. Second, even if Bob Kane was aware of individual X's existence, it does not necessarily follow that Bob Kane was referring to individual X in any of his Bat-stories. The supposed similarities between The Batman and

[39] Bob Kane now receives official credit for the creation/activation of The Batman. However, on pg. 34 of *The Comic Book Encyclopaedia,* Ron Goulart, refers to The Batman as the "creation of artist Bob Kane and writer Bill Finger."

individual X could amount to nothing more than a coincidence.[40] More to the point, if, for some reason, it turns out to be the case that Bob Kane was in fact referring to individual X, then The Batman is no longer necessarily a fictional character[41] and no longer a suitable case study for my thesis.

Of the literature I have considered, there is one additional reason to reject that fictional characters could be possible objects. As suggested by Wolterstorff, a fictional character is not a possible object if it is described as performing a logically impossible task, such as squaring the circle. Obviously, if a logically impossible act is predicated of a fictional character, and it is somehow essential to the identity of that character, then this character cannot be a possible person. For instance, in *Superman/Batman #17*, The Batman travels back in time and prevents the death of his parents. By doing so, Bruce Wayne negates the impetus to become The Batman and thereby his subsequent time travel as The Batman.[42] However, regardless of the contentions surrounding time travel, such a story might prove an exception once we consider it in the context of the entire Bat-catalogue, possibly as a tangent and thus somehow an unnecessary property of The Batman. Regardless, if fictional characters are not possible objects, then any benefits that this perspective might provide to the problem of identity will be of no use to my investigation.

[40] To clarify a potential confusion then, there is a sense in which The Batman is a possible person insofar as there is a person who also happens to be called The Batman and has even done many, but certainly not all, of the things which one or several stories have described The Batman of doing. However, this will be entirely coincidental and hence, not necessarily the same Batman.

[41] Such characters will be in Parson's term, "imported" and described as they appear in the real world such as Napoleon in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*. Of course there will be exceptions to this, where a character is not explicitly imported, but represented metaphorically such as in Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* in which the author is retelling his own experience through the use of a fictional character.

[42] Time travel is another contentious manner, but the consensus appears to be that the past cannot be altered by an act that would prevent that act from occurring in the first place. See David Lewis, "The Paradoxes of Time Travel."

1.5 Creationist Accounts of Fictional Characters

Finally, we are in a position to return to our now much neglected first intuition, that fictional characters are created. To uphold this intuition, we must assess how fictional characters are created and any resulting ontological implications. The creation of a fictional character, intuitively, is the product of an author's particular neurological activity in tandem with a "physical" act such as writing, speaking, performing and so forth. Unfortunately, we often do not have access to the drafts or the author's precise mental configuration at the moment of creation, so for the purposes of my investigation, the published work will have to suffice. Theories that claim fictional characters are created and hence existent entities, are not surprisingly, referred to as "Creationist" or "Creationism."

1.6 Creation by Pretence

Our first venture into Creationist accounts of fictional characters is John Searle's work, "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse." Interestingly enough, Searle's primary concern is not the creation of fictional characters, but the semantics of fictional discourse. According to Searle, fictional discourse is exempt from select semantic conventions, and that this exemption results in the creation of a fictional character.

Searle's position is founded on the belief that speaking and writing are types of illocutionary acts. For instance, to make an assertion, ask a question, or to make a demand, are all examples of illocutionary acts. Assertions, in particular, are governed by four "specific semantic and pragmatic rules:"[43]

> 1) The essential rule: the maker of an assertion commits himself to the truth of the expressed proposition.
> 2) The preparatory rules: the speaker must be in a position to provide evidence or reasons for the truth of the expressed proposition.
> 3) The expressed proposition must not be obviously true to both the speaker and the hearer in the context of utterance.

[43] Searle, John. "The Logical Status of Fictional Discourse," pg. 322

4) The sincerity rule: the speaker commits himself to a belief in the truth of the expressed proposition.[44]

Consider someone who reports on some catastrophic event as it unfolds in a remote part of the world. The very act of reporting and conveying the information to the viewers commits the reporter to the truth of the information. The reporter provides evidence through eye-witness testimonials, capturing the event on film, etc. Naturally, since empirical events are not a priori, the truth of such a catastrophe cannot be obvious to anyone, at least not to anyone who is not within a reasonable proximity of the catastrophe. Finally, the reporter also believes in the accuracy of the information presented. This last point will fundamentally differ from information conveyed that the reporter believes to be false or happens to be indifferent to, such instances would not necessarily qualify as assertions.

Conversely, fictional discourse is composed of "pretended illocutions" and so could never conform to the aforementioned rules. If an author only pretends to assert something factual, then the author does not believe in the truth of their assertion, certainly cannot provide evidence (or at least genuine evidence) and so, is not committed to the truth of that assertion,

> What makes fiction possible, I suggest, is a set of extralinguistic, nonsemantic conventions that break the connection between words and the world established by the rules mentioned earlier...What they do rather is enable the speaker the use of the words with their literal meanings without undertaking the commitments that are normally required by those meanings[45]

Searle suggests that pretence allows an author use of a language as it normally functions grammatically, but not semantically. Fictional discourse is immune from the truth that is demanded by a literal interpretation or, at least, when fictional discourse is considered in the context of the concrete world. Given that *to pretend* is an intentional verb, i.e., one cannot

[44] Ibid pg. 322
[45] Ibid pg. 326

pretend without intentionally doing so, Searle's position provides one necessary condition for an illocutionary act to qualify as fictional discourse, "the identifying criterion for whether or not a text is a work of fiction must of necessity lie in the illocutionary intentions of the author."[46] Moreover, Searle's account will require us to properly distinguish fictional discourse from illocutionary acts that deliberately intend to deceive the readers, such as propaganda.[47]

Now consider when an author is in the act of composing fictional discourse. When an author first describes a fictional character, the act of pretence entails that the author is not referring to anything, but is only pretending to do so. According to Searle, the simple act of *pretending to refer*, results in the creation of a fictional character, "by pretending to refer to (and recount the adventures of) a person, [the author] creates a fictional character."[48] Once a fictional character is created, the readers have an entity to which they *actually* refer—the fictional character in the novel. As a result, illocutionary acts about fictional characters after the work is published will adhere to the regular set of semantic conventions, just like our reporter in the example above.

As straightforward as Searle's account appears, there are several concerns that need to be addressed. My first concern is with a rather interesting and possibly unwanted implication. Consider characters of mythology or pagan gods, such as the Norse god Odin. If we reject the truth of paganism, then we deny that Odin *exists.* If Odin does not exist, then we are inclined to believe that Odin is a fabrication, much like The Batman and all other fictional characters. There is however, one important distinction. The fabrication of Odin was not necessarily the result of any pretended illocutions but more likely the product of a

[46] Ibid pg. 325
[47] Fictional discourse is not deceitful since the reader also participates in the pretence. Propaganda, on the other hand, is usually believed to be true by the readers.
[48] Ibid pg. 330

sincerely motivated attempt by an individual to explain some phenomenon that was clearly beyond their primitive scientific and epistemological limitations. As John Woods claims in *The Logic of Fiction*, once we reject the truth of paganism, attempts are made to explain the origins of the belief as "theology and science thrown into disrepute."[49] By contrast, as Woods states and Searle most certainly implies, fictional characters or fictional discourse "pretends no such literal congress with reality; it is make-believe from the beginning."[50] If the fabrication of mythological characters is not the result of pretended illocutions, then by Searle's account, they are not properly fictional characters, nor do the stories about them necessarily qualify as fictional discourse. Consequently, the creation of mythological characters is not accountable by Searle's position, nor, would it seem, could mythological characters be of the same breed as fictional characters. Luckily, the exact ontology of mythological characters, should it in fact differ from fictional characters or whether it could be similarly accommodated for by a mythically-catered set of conventions, are concerns for a thesis other than mine.

The first official criticism of Searle's account is the accusation, by Yagisawa, of failing to provide sufficient detail of the creative act, "it does nothing to explain how the author can possibly create the character out of thin air."[51] Yagisawa's criticism is certainly justified. Searle does not provide an explanation of the metaphysical dimension that, presumably, would accompany a comprehensive Creationist account. Searle provides no further details of Creationism other than that it is a by-product of *pretended* illocutionary acts. This criticism, however, I think is somewhat sidestepped, or at least temporarily suspended, if we interpret Searle's claim as primitive. Obviously, we could paraphrase *pretending to refer* as

[49] Woods, John. *The Logic of Fiction,* pg. 30
[50] Ibid, pg. 30
[51] Yagisawa, Takashi. "Against Creationism in Fiction," pg. 155

a particular mental configuration of the author in conjunction with a physical act such as writing, acting or speaking, but either way, I think the basic idea of the Creationist position is inherent in both: the creation of a fictional character is the result of an author's creative act, prior to which the fictional character did not exist. Moreover, Searle did not necessarily intend for his account to be explainable beyond what he presents. Recall that Searle's primary concern is to assess the semantics of fictional discourse. Thus, Searle may have simply drawn out an implication of his position or, better yet, attempted to describe the semantic dimension of Creationism, possibly to complement the precise neurological-metaphysical event that takes place.

However, to Yagisawa's credit, Searle offers no further elaboration on this newly created entity. As discussed earlier, Searle appears to support the qualitative sense of existence, which suggests that *fictional existence* is a weaker currency. Consequently, Searle's Creationist account is rendered uninteresting and of little utility, at least for the purposes of my investigation. Moreover, if we interpret Creationism, as Yagisawa adamantly insists we do, as bringing fictional characters into "robust existence, viz., existence in actuality, not any watered-down kind of existence, such as existence in the speaker's mind, existence as an idea, or existence in fiction"[52] then Searle's position is not exactly transparent, if what is *created* does not really *exist*.

If we did attempt to construct intertextual identity conditions out of Searle's rather lean account, then our only workable axioms are, 1) the minimal but necessary link to the author's intention, an intention which is necessary only for the author to compose fictional discourse, but not necessarily with respect to any other intentional elements that often

[52] Ibid pg. 156

feature in fictional discourse,[53] and 2) textual analysis or the reliance on the specific story in which the fictional character appears. But, as we will see with Amie Thomasson's Creationist account, it is the other intentions of the author that might provide a sturdier foundation upon which to build intertextual identity conditions. Furthermore, with respect to textual analysis, if we rely only on the text in which the fictional character appears, the development of intertextual identity conditions is likely to follow a similar, if not identical path to Parsons' Meinongian account and, dare I say, blur the distinction between Meinongian and Creationist positions and any advantage one perspective might possess over the other.

Consequently, I cannot help but wonder, thus far, if the only advantage to Searle's account vs. a Meinongian alternative is that it allows us to faithfully adhere to our first intuition, that fictional characters are created. However, if the Meinongian perspective can just as easily accommodate intertextual identity conditions, then the choice between the two might simply boil down to a chocolate vs. vanilla preference: either one accepts the peculiar claim that "*there are* such things as nonexistent objects" or one accepts the claim that fictional characters are *created* entities despite a large degree of mystery and ambiguity that surrounds the creative act.

1.7 Fictional Characters as Theoretical Entities

We turn now to consider another possibility by which to explain the ontology of our mysteriously *created* entities to see whether they might truly offer an alternative to the Meinongian position. In "Creatures of Fiction," Van Inwagen claims that fictional characters

[53] Of course, there are other intentions of an author such as how passages are to be interpreted, metaphors, subtext, genre classification and so forth. The importance of intentionality in Searle's account is only with respect to pretence; it is not necessarily meant to apply to every one of the author's intentions.

do indeed *exist* and that their existence is needed, at the very least, for the pursuits of literary criticism.[54]

Interestingly enough, Van Inwagen does not provide an explanation of how fictional characters are created, but only that fictional characters do, in fact, exist. He begins by considering three rather uncontroversial sentences:

> 1. There are characters in some 19th-century novels who are presented with a greater wealth of physical detail than is any character in any 18th-century novel.
> 2. Some characters in novels are closely modeled on actual people, while others are wholly products of the literary imagination, and it is usually impossible to tell which characters fall into which of these categories by textual analysis alone.
> 3. Since 19th-century English novelists were, for the most part, conventional Englishmen, we might expect most novels of the period to contain stereotyped comic Frenchmen or Italians; but very few such characters exist.[55]

Indeed, unless one happens to feel philosophically stubborn or, perhaps, is of some peculiar literary perspective, then one might be hard pressed to deny the truth of these sentences. However, all three sentences, very cleverly I might add, also suggest that fictional characters exist. "*There are* characters in 19th century novels..." "*Some* characters in novels..." and "...very few such characters *exist,"* are semantically equivalent, insofar as they assert that fictional characters exist. Consequently, to accept the truth of these sentences is to accept that fictional characters exist, otherwise these sentences would be false.

Van Inwagen introduces a new and aptly suited designation, "creatures of fiction,"[56] for fictional characters. Creatures of fiction, in turn, he classifies under a broader category of things designated "theoretical entities of literary criticism."[57] Note that while van Inwagen's

[54] Van Inwagen argues against a Meinongian account of fictional characters, however he does not offer an account of how fictional characters are created nor a particular Creationist theory which he may support.
[55] Van Inwagen, Peter. "Creatures of Fiction," pg. 302
[56] Ibid pg. 302
[57] Ibid pg. 302

three sentences assert that fictional characters exist, they do so within an exclusively literary context; 1 and 3 note certain characteristics about 18th and 19th century novels and 2 notes the insufficiency of a text to determine whether a fictional character is native or immigrant. This is a critical point. Van Inwagen suggests that literary criticism or literary studies require the existence of such entities in order to make literary assertions true, "entities that are never the subjects of non-literary discourse, and which make up the extensions of the theoretical general terms of literary criticism."[58]

Van Inwagen's account essentially grants fictional characters a sort of literary asylum. Within a literary context, fictional characters can be discussed and referred to, parallel to how we discuss everyday ordinary objects in an everyday ordinary context using everyday ordinary terms. For instance, if one were to investigate the homoerotic subtext of 20th century literature, then The Batman would be a most suitable candidate.[59] However, if one were to investigate homoeroticism in some other context, say, football, then one would certainly not use The Batman character. Presumably, any discussion of fictional characters outside of a literary context will somehow be deemed inappropriate and maybe even incoherent (parallel to how Searle's account suspends the set of conventions that ordinarily govern assertive-type illocutionary acts that would otherwise serve to render fictional discourse false and incoherent). But this should not be interpreted as devaluing the ontological status of creatures of fiction. For instance, many branches within the discipline of physics require hypothetical particles such as dark matter, bosons or antimatter to explain

[58] Ibid pg. 303

[45] The controversial relationship between The Batman and his first sidekick, Dick Grayson/Robin was and still is a contentious matter. The homosexual subtext was first discussed in Frederic Werthem's *Seduction of the Innocent* and something portrayed not too long ago in a series of water color paintings by Mark Chamberlain. http://www.artnet.com/artist/424157172/mark-chamberlain.html. Note that the contents of his website are often very graphic.

certain phenomena. However, such particles are rarely if ever used to explain or describe something ordinary such as the making of coffee or searing meat on a barbeque.

The properties by which creatures of fiction are described, van Inwagen maintains, are not actually predicated of fictional characters, but rather "ascribed"[60] to the character. Whatever properties fictional characters are perceived to have, this relation should more accurately be perceived as fictional characters "bearing a certain intimate relation"[61] to the properties by which they are described. To capture this "intimate relation," van Inwagen introduces the story operator, A(x, y, z). The variables stand for the following: A is the fictional work, x is a property of the fictional character, y, and z represents the location or "place" in the particular novel, such as the page number or sentence where the property x is ascribed to fictional character y. For example, consider *All Star Batman and Robin* (psychopath, The Batman, pg. 25, issue 2). Such a relation reads: On page 4, issue 2 (z), of *All Star Batman and Robin* (A), The Batman (y), is ascribed the property of mental instability (x).

Properties that fictional characters actually *have,* van Inwagen claims are "higher order" properties, such as self identity, existence and non-identity with any ordinal numbers. Furthermore, contrary to positions held by both Parsons and Kripke, van Inwagen claims that fictional characters do adhere to the laws of logic. Recall our assessment of fictional characters as having incomplete biographies and physical descriptions. The set of properties that would otherwise constitute a complete description of a fictional character was, until now, assumed indeterminate. To the contrary, van Inwagen claims that the properties which would ordinarily classify as indeterminate are simply not true. Properties that were

[60] Van Inwagen understands the problem with using the term "ascription" or any similar term for that matter. The point is that whatever term is used, its use is to be interpreted as relation weaker than predication.
[61] Ibid pg. 305

indeterminate such as weight, ingrown toenails, etc, cannot be true because the author was noncommittal on the matter. In other words, fictional characters simply do not have indeterminate properties.[62]

The only major point of interest in van Inwagen's account is his story operator. The three place predicate helps to avoid the supposed inconsistencies in property ascription that result as the events of a novel unfold or if the author inadvertently makes a mistake. Since the story operator will give each property ascription a specific time and location, it is impossible to simultaneously ascribe incompatible properties to the same character. Moreover, if ascription is intended to be a softer relation than predication, some degree of incompatibility or inconsistency may even be permissible. For reasons I have introduced, and for reasons forthcoming, the story operator is of some benefit to the discussion of fictional characters such as The Batman, although I am unsure how the operator might advance my pursuit of intertextual identity conditions. If the properties that are ascribed to a character are to play some role in the determination of intra/intertextual identity conditions, and presumably they do, the story operator is likely to make this role somewhat peculiar. Essentially, the story operator makes true every property ever ascribed to the character, even the mistakes. Unfortunately, this appears either to render useless the story operator as a tool for developing intertextual identity conditions or to reduce the significance of the role that properties might play in the identification of fictional characters.

Moreover, the use of the story operator presupposes that we know that it is the same character each time that the character's name is used in the operator. Recall the multiple character concern I addressed in Parsons' account. While the multiple character concern is

[62] Interestingly enough, in spite of obeying the laws of logic, contrary to that of Kripke, van Inwagen's position appears to strengthen Kripke's argument. Since the properties that are indeterminate of a fictional character are in fact false, no possible person could meet such a description as it would entail lacking properties essential to being alive.

not necessarily an intratextual obstacle for the Creationists, it will be intertextually. To use the operator intertextually would first require a consolidation of all the works about a character; to know that the name which appears in the operator designates the same fictional character as it does in all the other works. In turn, this requires us to know the identity of the fictional character in order to know which works to include or exclude. If we cannot identify the character or, as I have given some reason to suggest with characters such as The Batman, if a fictional character's name is not a rigid designator, then the story operator is of no real benefit to my investigation.

1.8 Fictional Characters as Abstract Artefacts

Our last foray into the Creationist perspective is the much welcomed and thorough account provided by Amie Thomasson's *Fiction and Metaphysics*. Like Searle and van Inwagen, Thomasson plays for team Creationist. The distinguishing feature of Thomasson's account that makes it particularly valuable to my investigation is her anchoring of both a fictional character's creation and continued existence in the concrete.

Unfortunately, Thomasson, like Searle, does not provide an elaborate metaphysical explanation of the creative act, but offers something comparable to what I earlier sketched as an intuitive answer, "fictional characters come into existence only through the mental and physical acts of an author – as essentially created entities."[63] To reiterate, I do not believe that such a slim account is fatal to the Creationist cause or to my investigation. After all, an attempt to develop intertextual identity conditions based on Meinongian and Creationist theories will eventually require that I assume the correctness of their theories in order to do so. Provided something problematic in their theories does not hinder my earnest pursuit, I can consider how to apply intertextual identity to such theories. Hence, if we presuppose

[63] Thomasson, Amie. *Fiction and Metaphysics,* pg. 8

that fictional characters are created, along the lines that have been suggested, then we do not necessarily have to concern ourselves with a precise and thorough account of the creative act—exact mental configurations, precise physical acts, etc, but simply the general how and epicentre of the creative process. Furthermore, the great leap of faith that this may require is certainly no more and, some might even argue, less peculiar, than the leap of faith required by the Meinongian doctrine, which essentially maintains that *there are* (or there *exists*) nonexistent objects.

According to Thomasson, a fictional character's existence and continued existence will depend on several variables. While a fictional character's creation is dependent on the creative act of the author, its continued existence is dependent on a copy of the text, a picture, knowledge of the language, or, in the case of plays, a performance and/or memory of the work. So long as one copy of the text survives, along with an individual who is proficient in the language of the text, then the fictional character continues to exist. This should not be understood as a fictional character's continued existence depending on one unique copy of the text or one particular individual's memory, unless, of course, only one copy of the text remains and only one person proficient in its language. But, assuming that there are many copies, editions, persons, then any random text or person will suffice; a fictional character's dependence on texts, language and memory is what Thomasson refers to as a "generic dependence." If the criteria, by which fictional characters continue to exist, are somehow not satisfied, such as when texts, languages and performances are forgotten or destroyed, then the fictional character is also destroyed, similar to when a house, painting or individual is destroyed, it simply ceases to exist. Consequently, fictional characters are fundamentally linked to the concrete. Moreover, this necessary link helps to clearly

distinguish her Creationist account from her Meinongian opponents and also deny fictional characters eternal subsistence once created.

The most interesting and important feature of Thomasson's Creationist account is her consideration of the spatiotemporal circumstances under which a creative act takes place. For Thomasson, the historical context and intentionality of the creative act is fundamentally tied to the created work such that it will form a necessary component of the work's identity and hence the characters within,

> a literary work is not an abstract sequence of words or concepts waiting to be discovered but instead is the creation of a particular individual or group at a particular time, in particular social and historical circumstances.[64]

Indeed, any creative act is never a decontextualized event; each creative act will necessarily be associated with some specific time, t, location, y, etc., regardless of whether it results in a genuine contribution to or influence on the created work. The significance of the spatiotemporal circumstances to the creative act is difficult to deny. Consider one type of work that best fuels Thomasson's motivation, namely, satirical works. Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is a social commentary, dare I say premonition, on totalitarian regimes that was largely influenced by the events surrounding the period in which it was composed (not to mention the drugs he was using).[65] Indeed, many of the characters' names are deliberately taken and modified from concrete people. Consequently, to incorporate historical circumstances into the creative act is to deny that *Brave New World* could have been written during the Middle Ages, Ancient Rome or at any other point in the space time continuum, and rightfully so.

The necessary function of the historical context and intentionality of the author in the creative act has two very important implications. First, if the historical context is

[64] Ibid pg. 8
[65] Huxley's use of psychedelic drugs was no secret. In particular, see his work, *The Doors of Perception*.

significant not just to satirical works but to all fictional works, as Thomasson suggests it is, then the same words in the same sequence haphazardly falling together at a different point in time, in a different location, or by a group of monkey typists, could not be the same fictional work.[66] By contrast, this does not follow from the Meinongian thesis. While the contextual element remains, it is of no significance to the Meinongian perspective; even if fictional characters are, in fact, activated rather than created, context will play no role in the identity of the text or the characters within. Given that nonexistent objects are immune to human contamination, the role of the individual who is responsible for the activation of a fictional character is entirely contingent. This is not to say that the Meinongian would entirely dismiss the context of the activation or the importance of the activator, but we will return to this point later on.

Second, Thomasson's account provides a necessary condition for the identity of fictional characters that will further distance her Creationist perspective from the Meinongians. If the specific author and context are fundamental to the creative act, then a fictional character's identity is inextricably linked to more than just the so called nuclear properties, as suggested by Parsons, but also extranuclear properties and even extratextual circumstances. The extratextual circumstances, as we will eventually see, play a critical role in the concept of a sequel. Moreover, the construction of intertextual identity conditions will require more than just Searle's one necessary intention required of every author to write fictional discourse, but possibly many of the author's circumstantial intentions, metaphors, symbolism and so forth as well. As a result, we will have to consider the possibility that

[66] There could be an instance, I suppose, where the author of the other book did and intended to do everything in the exact same manner as Huxley without any knowledge of what Huxley was doing. Even so, there would still be some differences, even if only seemingly trivial ones such as the author's ancestry, residence, diet, etc. To maintain Thomasson's position, however, such trivial differences would suffice to distinguish the works. In fact we could not even call them trivial since they are necessary to distinguish two works that might otherwise be thought of as the same. I am unsure whether such details could be of the required metaphysical significance.

intertextual identity conditions are constructed first on extranuclear and extratextual properties and only secondarily on (but nonetheless important) nuclear properties. But before I can thoroughly assess these possibilities, I must attempt the arduous exposition of The Batman character.

CHAPTER TWO: WHO IS THE BATMAN?

2.0 Holy Homework, Batman!

Given seventy plus years worth of publications, the number of Bat-stories is probably somewhere around ten thousand.[67] Not surprisingly any attempt to outline a "biography"[68] of The Batman is bound to unearth a few inconsistencies, peculiarities and naturally, some absurdities. Furthermore, it should be even less surprising that I will take many liberties and sacrifice much to keep The Batman's biography relatively concise. Undoubtedly, the forthcoming account will have some Batman fundamentalists screaming heresy only to have some philosophers screaming superfluity. Regardless, what my exposition should certainly not be accused of is providing a "definitive" account of The Batman, as that would presuppose an answer to my investigation. Indeed, this discussion requires me to assume that I am always referring to the same character, which may very well turn out to be false. The many forthcoming examples, many of which would likely feature in a definitive account, should one exist, were arbitrarily selected and could easily be replaced by other equally "important" examples.[69]

Unfortunately, given the creation/activation process of a comic book—creative teams, publications, plot, character development, capitalistic motivations and so on, there is really no easy way to do justice to the many dimensions that make The Batman character worthy of such a philosophical investigation. For reasons that will become exceedingly obvious, I will do my best to divide my exposition of The Batman into 1) the publications

[67] To my knowledge the number is not actually known primarily because in addition to the many titles in which The Batman appears as the central protagonist, The Batman has, at one time or another, appeared in virtually every other DCU title and often more than once. Furthermore, with the number of DC titles presently in publication and forthcoming, this number is tedious (and expensive) to keep track of.

[68] By biography, I mean the properties and events of The Batman/Bruce Wayne as opposed to "The Batman phenomenon" which would entail some extratextual perspective that would be applied to all the mediums, literature, video games, movies, etc.

[69] For instance I will all but ignore any discussion of The Batman's sidekick, Robin, despite that a more thorough biography would likely have to include much discussion of The Robin character.

and 2) a biography or the "continuity"[70] of the character. Following this, I will expose the concerns most relevant[71] to my philosophical inquiry and consider how Meinongians and Creationists might best handle them.

2.1 The Publications

To reiterate, The Batman/Bruce Wayne[72] was conceived[73] by Bob Kane and Bill Finger and first appeared in *Detective Comics,* #27, May 1939. The Batman character was an instant success and within a year went on to star in its own self-titled comic book, *Batman,* in 1940.[74] Both *Batman* and *Detective Comics* are still published today with *Batman* just recently reaching 700 issues and *Detective Comics* nearing 900.[75] However, tracking The Batman's continuity between the two titles is anything but transparent. In general, and I must stress, there are many exceptions, the story-arcs in *Batman* behave like chapters or segments of The Batman's ongoing life and offer relatively seamless transitions from one story-arc to next.

Detective Comics, on the other hand, does not as often contribute to The Batman's continuity and has come to function more as a supplementary or secondary title. The story-arcs in *Detective Comics* are usually self-contained, nor are the succession of story-arcs strictly chronological or cross referencing with the story-arcs in *Batman*. The most important exception to note is the intermittent "crossover."[76] Typically, a crossover will begin in

[70] Continuity refers to the "life" of The Batman or DC Comics' attempt to have a consistent ongoing story
[71] My exposition of The Batman character is likely to produce additional philosophical questions that are beyond the scope of my investigation.
[72] For the time being we will assume that The Batman and Bruce Wayne are the exact same fictional character. We will relax and assess this assumption later on.
[73] Rather than continue to use creation/activation in order to pay lip service to both theories I will use the term conceive to cover instances where both are applicable. The terms create and activate will be used separately but only when discussing the relevant perspective.
[74] Despite receiving its own title, The Batman remained the central protagonist in *Detective Comics,* barring several exceptions.
[75] Given the events of the mini-series *Final Crisis,* both books were on hiatus until June 2009.
[76] A crossover is a multi-comic book series or multi-title event, in which multiple creative teams weave the story-arc between two or more titles requiring the reader to read (and more importantly purchase) all the comic book titles involved in order to read the complete story.

Batman with the next segment occurring in *Detective Comics* or another title and so forth.[77] For instance, the first volume, of the much larger crossover, "The Knightfall Saga," entitled "Broken Bat," intertwines *Batman #492-497* and *Detective Comics #659-663* and is presently a part of continuity. To further appreciate the exception of the crossover and its contribution to the many problems ahead, when concluded, "The Knightfall Saga" consisted of seventy one issues, across eight different DC titles, spanning a two year period.

Sadly, "The Knightfall Saga" is only the tip of the iceberg with respect to the exceptions and difficulties in my attempt to track The Batman's continuity. Beyond *Batman* and *Detective Comics*, there are several other Batman titles, titles which occasionally have contributed to The Batman's continuity, such as *Legends of The Dark Knight [LOTDK];* titles that have snubbed continuity, such as *All Star Batman & Robin [ASBAR]*; and titles that have yet to establish any position on continuity, such as *Batman Confidential.* In addition, The Batman has, at one time or another, appeared in virtually every other DC publication, many of whose central characters are also subject to the same aforementioned and forthcoming complexities such as *The Green Lantern* and *Superman.*[78]

There are also mini-series'[79] which star The Batman, most of which are tangents, such as *The Dark Knight Returns* (*TDKR*) and *Gotham by Gaslight (GBG).* Occasionally, however, there are also DCU altering mini-series which explicitly modify and reconstruct the

[77] There are also auxiliary stories called "tie ins." When there is a "major" story-arc exclusive to one title, additional stories are concurrently published in related titles. These stories are usually related to the major story-arc either by way of explaining preceding events, subsequent events or sometimes even fleshing out a slice of the major event. However, they are not essential as in the case of a crossover. For instance the "Heart of Hush" story-arc published in *Detective Comics #846*-850 told of events preceding the "Batman R.I.P" story-arc in *Batman #676-681*. Both titles were concurrently published with their "connectedness" all but nonexistent such that reading only one of the two would not result in any confusion or missing something important.

[78] If the DCU is meant to be one consistent story world, then in theory we would have to solve the continuity of all the characters since they supposedly all exist within the same world. Hence what is essential to one character might have to be so all the characters in virtue of them inhabiting the same universe. For instance if Superman did X at T, then a property of The Batman will be inhabiting a world in which Superman did X at T.

[79] A mini-series is a short run title with a predetermined number of issues and is discontinued once finished.

continuity of all the DCU superheroes, such as *Crisis on Infinite Earths,* and *Infinite Crisis*. Furthermore, some of the DCU altering mini-series have retroactively fitted (retconned) some of the tangents into The Batman's continuity.[80]

Finally, given the events of the "Batman: R.I.P." story-arc in *Batman*, in association with the DCU altering mini-series *Final Crisis,*[81] the publication of both *Detective Comics* and *Batman* was temporarily suspended, during which the miniseries *Battle for the Cowl* was published in order to establish a "New Batman." In June 2009 both titles resumed publication along with two additional titles *Batman & Robin,* (not to be confused with *ASBAR)* and *Batman: Gotham Streets*. While *Batman, Batman & Robin* and *Batman: Gotham Streets* feature the "New Batman/Dick Grayson" as the central protagonist, *Detective Comics* presently features "Batwoman/Katherine Kane" as the central protagonist, although both will most certainly be temporary.

2.2 A "Biography" of The Batman

The very first appearance of The Batman in *Detective Comics #27,* "The Case of the Chemical Syndicate," tells the story about the attempted takeover of Apex Chemical Corporation via the murdering of its various owners. Fortunately, The Batman doesn't let that happen. Unfortunately, *Detective Comics* #27 offers very little in the way of "character development,"[82] and so predicates very little of The Batman character. What the readers do learn of The Batman is that he is obviously a costumed crime fighter, working for, but

[80] This is not so much a problem when it introduces properties that were just assumed to be true of The Batman but were simply "delayed," as I have suggested the Meinongian might argue. However, this becomes a problem when A) it produces inconsistencies or B) and whether it should then be thought of as a distinct character.

[81] The consequences of this mini-series were left extremely ambiguous such that whatever changes took place, they have yet to be explicitly revealed.

[82] I am unsure whether the comic book medium is ever on a level that would have one might ordinarily qualify as character development. However, even if comic book characters remain relatively flat and static, they are still involved in ongoing interrelated events. For lack of a better term, I will use character development.

outside, the law, and has extensive training and talents to that end. The big revelation occurs in the last few panels when the reader learns that The Batman is *really* the millionaire, Bruce Wayne.[83]

Many important properties of The Batman/Bruce Wayne were introduced in subsequent issues. For instance, the tragic event that provides the impetus for Bruce Wayne to eventually become The Batman is not conceived until *Detective Comics #33*, November 1939. As a young child, Bruce Wayne witnesses the murder of his parents, Thomas[84] and Martha[85] Wayne, at the hands of a mugger, Joe Chill. Kneeling over their dead bodies, Bruce Wayne swears to devote his life to the war against crime and is later inspired to do so by adopting the persona of a Bat.

And so, The Batman began kicking ass until 1960, when the first drastic revision of The Batman character was undertaken,

> In short, DC Comics was not concerned with a universe of consistent story details until the 1960's. Prior to that, the editors' presumption was that the readership turned over every six to eight years…That all ended when Editor Julie Schwartz introduced the Earth-1/Earth-2 concept…with the first Batman published considered to be set on Earth-2. That became the home to all the heroes considered the forerunners of the superheroes most know today.[86]

The introduction of parallel Earths and The Batman of Earth-1 marked the official beginning of "The Batman of Continuity," or The BoC. The majority of the literature prior to 1960 was then attributed to the Batman of Earth-2. However, with the exception of the dates and times, many events transpired in an otherwise identical fashion. For instance, the

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[83] Naturally, many other "facts" could be extrapolated from the pages of *Detective Comics #27* and attributed to The Batman, many of which would seem trivial such as the specific style of punches or kicks used to apprehend the criminals and so forth. While not to dismiss their significance, I will not concern myself with such details.

[84] At the present it is unsure whether Thomas Wayne actually died. While it is certainly seems so, the events of the story-arc "Batman R.I.P." in *Batman # 667-681* has cast some doubt on this.

[85] The name of Bruce's mother is not revealed until *Batman #47,* June 1948

[86] Greenberger, Robert. *The Essential Batman Encyclopedia,* pg. VII

night on which Bruce Wayne of Earth-2 witnessed his parents' murder was June 26, 1924,[87] whereas no specific date is given for Bruce Wayne of Earth-1. However, the manner in which the event transpired and their so called "consequences"[88] remained the same.

Many more parallel Earths and Batmen soon followed. Inevitably, the DCU became congested. In an attempt to once again simplify the DCU, DC Comics published the mini-series *Crisis on Infinite Earths (COIE)*. The events of *COIE* reduced the DCU to one Earth—Earth-1, but folded various elements of several other Earths into Earth-1. Technically Earth-1 was now Post-*COIE* Earth-1.[89] Consequently, the continuity of all the DCU characters was fundamentally altered. For instance, Joe Chill was removed from the DCU altogether, thereby altering The Batman of Pre-*COIE* Earth-1's past—now The Batman of Post-*COIE* Earth 1, such that Bruce Wayne was never made aware of who killed his parents (technically neither are the readers). The Batman's background was then retold in the "Year one" story-arc in *Batman #404-407*.

Ironically, *COIE* rather than simplifying the DCU, made things even more complex. However, at least Post-*COIE* inconsistencies were given a "plausible" explanation: the events of *COIE* left the DCU in a fragile and unstable condition. The DCU was then periodically altered[90] only to culminate in the events of another DCU altering mini-series, *Infinite Crisis*. *Infinite Crisis* resulted in another rebirth of the DCU, but as a mere 52 universes,

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[87] Thomas, Roy. *Secret Origins, #6,* September 1986

[88] By primary, I mean insofar as it provided the impetus for Bruce Wayne to become The Batman. Obviously, there are other consequences that subsequently diverge between the two Earths.

[89] I am unsure whether this is the standard nomenclature. Often such names are introduced, sometimes by the readers, to minimize confusion and distinguish events and properties that may otherwise appear to contradict one another

[90] There has been at least one other important revision, the mini-series *Zero Hour: Crisis in Time,* but given the "unstable" state of the DCU at this time, I am blanketing this event under the *Post-COIE* Earth-1 Batman.

in stark contrast to the pre-*COIE* number of infinity.[91] "Post-*COIE* Earth-1" simply became "New Earth." The Batman's continuity was again fundamentally altered and Joe Chill was returned to the DCU and again made the man responsible for the death of Thomas and Martha Wayne. To further make a mess of the DCU, many of the tangential mini-series were retconned into the DCU as having transpired within one of the 52 parallel universes. For instance, *GBG* supposedly took place on Earth-19 (The Batman of Earth-19) and *TDKR* on Earth-31 (The Batman of Earth-31).

Beyond the deliberate and "official" modifications made to The Batman's continuity, the ever growing literature on The Batman, and all DCU characters, resulted in many unintentional inconsistencies as well, some of which probably have yet to be uncovered, others hopelessly complicated and ludicrous as the following:

> [*LOTDK*] #s 46-49's depiction of Cat-Man as a deranged serial killer was pretty flatly contradicted by Alan Grant's story in *Catwoman* #26 and *Shadow of the Bat #s* 43-44, which spun off the character's pre-Crisis origin, not to mention the rest of his post-Crisis stories, which don't reflect this sort of characterization. [*LOTDK*] #s 89-90 set the origin of the second Clayface, Matt Hagen, in the pre-Robin era, which doesn't jibe with DC's history in "Mud Pack" (*Secret Origins* #44; *Detective Comics* #s 604-607), where Batman hadn't even fought the first Clayface (Basil Karlo) until Robin came along.[92]

Lastly, in addition to the intentional and unintentional revisions made to The Batman's continuity, there are also the controversial appearances of "Bat-substitutes," when someone other than Bruce Wayne held The Batman designation. Returning to the "Knightfall" crossover, the readers learn that The Batman's back is broken by the super villain, Bane, and while indisposed, Bruce Wayne hands over The Batman title/job duties to Azrael/Jean-Paul Valley. Moreover, the most recent occurrence of a Bat-substitute is presently in effect: Bruce

[91] This did not bring back the original Earth-2. The "New Earth-2" was different and is presently left largely undescribed."
[92] Rozakis, Bob. http://www.comicsbulletin.com/bobro/103887248221989.htm

Wayne is presumed dead,[93] when in fact he is in another dimension/parallel earth/time period and so Dick Grayson/The First Robin has taken up the mantle of The Batman for what is sure to be only another brief interlude, as all the substitutes tend to be.

2.3 Holy Complications, Batman!

As I had forewarned, my exposition of The Batman has revealed more idiosyncrasies than I initially intended to address and certainly more than my thesis could adequately manage. The question to now consider is: just how many Batmen are there? Given the many idiosyncrasies, there are reasons to suggest either the preferred conclusion, that there somehow remains a singular Batman character, or the possibly unfortunate conclusion, that there are, in fact, multiple fictional characters.

First, in spite of the many revisions, inconsistencies and tangents, one cannot but help feel inclined towards some unitary solution that maintains that the aggregate publications remain, in essence, about the same Batman character, (not to mention the various other mediums in which The Batman appears). After all, there is some reason why the majority of The Batman comics have more or less always involved Bruce Wayne as The Batman and have kept some basic elements more or less intact. There are the extreme measures DC Comics took in order to preserve sameness of character, such as the various DCU altering mini-series, regardless of how contrived or unconvincing these explanations might be. We should also not underestimate the importance of the reader, or, at least, the small demographic of the ever faithful Batman acolytes who continue to read and purchase all

[93] In the *Final Crisis* mini-series, Bruce Wayne/The Batman was hit by Darkseid's Omega Sanction, which appears to kill its victim, but actually sends them to some sort of alternate reality; the details of which are left extremely vague. Furthermore, this information is only made available to the reader's and not to the characters within the story.

things "Batman" and continue to read stories about The Batman[94] precisely because they want to read about *The* Batman.

Consider again the introduction of The Batman of Earth-1 and Earth-2 in the 1960s. This introduction was largely an attempt to streamline The Batman character by reassigning much of the pre-1960s publications and hence properties to The Batman of Earth-2. While our initial suggestion is that both characters somehow remained metaphysically The Batman, the introduction of multiple Batmen also suggests that we could claim the creation/activation of multiple fictional characters. After all, a cynical but perhaps correct view might suggest that all the divisions and alterations were nothing more than an attempt to sell more comic books and the say so of DC Comics in no way should supersede their metaphysical heresies. Should this in fact be the case, we have the additional problem to determine which one was the new character, was it The Batman of Earth-1, Earth-2 or both? Moreover, to suggest that the initial division did, in fact, result in multiple characters suggests that we could treat all subsequent Bat-fissions similarly. Hence, the fact of the matter is that new characters were conceived following each DCU altering event, as is the case with the many tangents, especially the ones that were later retconned into DCU continuity, and also the Bat-substitutes such as Azrael and Dick Grayson. Moreover, the DCU altering events could be perceived as conceptually equivalent to the tangents, insofar as the story worlds are just as drastically altered. To the benefit of the DCU altering events, an "explanation" is provided as to why the universe is now the way it is, although the idea of an explanation will be the source of some contention later on.

[94] Barring cases where readers purchase certain comic book titles because of a specific writer, artist or accolade the work receives. In such cases the reader might not care specifically about whether it is the same character or one that is distinct.

It is now is now time to return from intuition and speculation to consider potential intertextual identity conditions for The Batman and other fictional characters that appear in multiple works. While I hope that the preceding exposition garnered some sympathy towards my now, very ambitious investigation, I must admit that I will not succeed in developing a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for intertextual identity, let alone solve The Batman's identity. What I do hope to accomplish is a thorough examination of two Meinongian based solutions for intertextual identity, solutions I will designate 1) The Bat-atom and 2) The Batman of Continuity. In conjunction with these solutions, I will consider Thomasson's reasons for their supposed failure. I do so because I believe that Thomasson's treatment of both accounts is underdeveloped and hence, unjust. Both solutions require additional considerations before it can be properly concluded that Thomasson is indeed correct, even if not for the reasons that she supplies. In order to do so, I will have to simultaneously juggle a defence of and an assault on both of these solutions. The Bat-atom solution, I argue is conceptually problematic, although not for the reasons provided by Thomasson, but because it trivializes the contributions made by subsequent works to the identity of the fictional character. The Batman of Continuity, on the other hand, I argue, might be able to withstand Thomasson's criticism, ironically[95] by thinking of fictional characters similar, but not identical, to van Inwagen's position. Given the concessions required in order to do so, I remain skeptical that The Batman of Continuity is as plausible a solution as I will suggest. Consequently, I will concede that Creationism in general is likely to provide the more promising foundation upon which to build intertextual identity conditions.

[95] Recall that van Inwagen is a Creationist, or, at least, argues that fictional characters exist. This, however, runs contrary to the Meinongian position despite that I modify van Inwagen's account to defend it.

2.4 The Bat-atom

The first Meinongian based solution to intertextual identity conditions is offered by Nicholas Wolterstorff in *Works and Worlds of Art.* Wolterstorff's proposal is to reduce a fictional character's identity to a nucleus of "essential" properties. The nucleus can then serve as the template for any subsequent use of the character. An author can then easily import the character and develop it further in any way they are so inspired. Provided each subsequent appearance of the character contains the nucleus of essential properties, we can conclude that it is the same character.

As I had mentioned in Chapter One, Wolterstorff, like Parsons, is of the Meinongian persuasion. Not surprisingly then, some features of Wolterstorff's account are virtually identical to Parsons'. Despite the appearance of redundancies, a fair explication of Wolterstorff's account nevertheless requires us to retrace some of our earlier steps.

In the preliminaries of his proposal, Wolterstorff provides the following definition of a fictional character,

> *K* is a *maximal* component in a work's word *WW* = df *K* is a component in *WW* and is such that, if there is any other component *K** of *WW* such that every property essential within *K* is essential within *K** but some property essential within *K** is not so within *K*, then if WW were to occur there would have to be an example of the *K* distinct from an example of *K**[96]

Similar to, but more elaborate than Parsons' maximal account, the *maximal component* is identified by all the properties predicated of the character by story's end, with the provision that they are essential to the character. As such, the earlier descriptions of the character, as found in previous chapters, paragraphs and so forth, represent components of the story world, but not maximal components. The components should then be thought of as subsets or essential parts of the maximal component in order to evade the multiple character

[96] Wolterstorff, Nicholas. *Works and Worlds of Art,* pg. 146

concern I raised during my assessment of Parsons' account. Furthermore, an earlier appearance of the character cannot have essential properties which are not also essential to the maximal component. If, for some reason, Wolterstorff's condition fails to hold, then a component and the maximal component, otherwise thought to be the same character, will be distinct. Properties which are determined to be nonessential, for whatever reason, are of no immediate concern, but something we will need to return to.

Wolterstorff's proposed solution for the subsequent use and intertextual identification of a fictional character involves identifying a fictional character by a simpler edifice, one which is always a component of any subsequent story (or even the initial story for that matter) in which it appears,

> Central within the Chichikov-in-*Dead Souls* character are such properties as *being a confidence trickster, being a denizen of Russia, being called 'Chichikov,'* etc. One may then form the concept of a character which has just those central, core properties essential within it. It is a component within the world of *Dead Souls*. But it is not a maximal component within it. Rather, it includes the maximal component which is the Chichikov-in-*Dead Souls* character.[97]

Following Wolterstorff's proposal, the idea would be to reduce The Batman character to a nucleus of essential properties and establish this as The Batman's identity or *The* Batman. Intertextual identification is then simply a matter of determining whether "The Bat-atom" is a component of any given work's maximal component. If The Bat-atom is identified as a component of any one of a given works maximal components, then we can properly conclude that it is *The* Batman, despite that the various maximal components, which contain The Bat-atom, will technically be distinct nonexistent objects. If a maximal component has all but one of The Bat-atom's essential properties, then we reject the work as containing *The* Batman. Any properties predicated in addition to The Bat-atom, regardless of whether they are essential to a subsequent work's maximal component, will be deemed superfluous or

[97] Ibid pg. 148

nonessential, at least with respect to *The* Batman's identity and intertextual identity conditions.

Prima facie, The Bat-atom approach has the potential to bring my investigation to an early close. Consider the first major partition of The Batman's history, the division into The Batman of Earth-1 and The Batman of Earth-2. Recall that, with the exception of the dates and times, certain events and properties remained ascribed to both characters. Provided the Bat-Atom is defined by this common set of properties, then we can reasonably conclude that they are both *The* Batman, despite whatever the intended directions DC comics had planned for the now distinct maximal components. Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that the set of properties, which remained common to both characters after the division, was intended to have precisely that effect. Similarly, if The Bat-atom, found in our Batmen of Earth 1 and 2, is also a component within all the tangents such as *GBG*, *TDKR*, then they are all similarly amended with the rest of the publications. Likewise, if The Bat-atom managed to survive the various cataclysmic DCU altering events, then The BoC is also resolved.

Finally, should it turn out that "The Batman" is not a proper name, and hence not a rigid designator, then whatever the nucleus of essential properties happens to be, it is likely to exclude from it any one particular fictional character, and would be defined along the occupational and symbolic lines I had discussed in Chapter One. This definition is likely to prove the most accommodating as it will resolve all of the above and also make room for the various substitutes such as Azrael and Dick Grayson, although the substitutes and The BoC, require additional assessment.

The other major advantage of The Bat-atom approach is that it permits a large degree of artistic freedom and interpretation. This advantage is not only necessary for the tangents,

but, given their narrative structure, it might even be necessary for their development. Consider *TDKR*. *TDKR* abandoned much of The BoC and modified many important elements. The plot takes place in a future where The Batman/Bruce Wayne[98] is now 50 years old and retired. However, circumstances become such that Bruce Wayne must once again don the cape and cowl. Moreover, the mood and atmosphere, as depicted by both the writing and illustrations, are noticeably more grim and nightmarish in contrast to the more "conventional" settings of The BoC and the other tangents. Nevertheless, The Bat-atom approach would permit such interpretations and allow us to maintain sameness of character.

It should be rather obvious, as I had forewarned in Chapter One, that Wolterstorff's proposal is all but conceptually identical to the proposed solution that I extrapolated from Wolheim's account, what I had called The Bat-universal. The only difference that I am inclined to admit between the two approaches is the set of properties that each might propose constitutes The Bat-atom. The Bat-universal seems to adhere closer to whatever happened to be the original character, while The Bat-atom could use nothing more than a subset of this supposed original character. This difference is likely to be negligible since many different sets of properties could just as easily be tabled within each perspective and none of which are likely to be exclusive to either approach. Moreover, as I had suggested in Chapter One, the Bat-universal, from whence it was extrapolated, appears to cater more towards accommodating the illustrative dimension of The Batman character and the comic book medium in general, and less towards the descriptive and dynamic features of storytelling and sequels. In fact, the many different sets of properties which are in the running for The Bat-atom candidacy serves well to briefly introduce Thomasson's reason for undermining The Bat-atom/universal approach: the inability to determine what is and is not

[98] Who was retconned as The Batman/Bruce Wayne of Earth-31

an essential property. Regardless, I fail to see any benefit to develop The Bat-universal independently of The Bat-atom, as it is not likely to provide us with any further insights or revelations. Hence, from here on, I deem it safe to consider these two approaches as one and the same, but will stick with Wolterstorff's terminology, as I believe it is the more elaborate and appropriate formulation of the two.

In spite of Wolterstorff's Meinongian perspective, I should stress that this approach is not necessarily exclusive to the Meinongian perspective. Obviously, for a Creationist to adopt an approach similar to Wolterstorff's will run the risk of blurring the distinction between Meinongian and Creationist theories and hence any advantage one theory might possess over the other. That said, if Creationists adopt a similar approach, it will only be to the extent to which properties contribute to the development of intertextual identity conditions. The incorporation of The Bat-atom should be in addition to what is exclusive to the Creationist framework. For instance, Thomasson's notion of the contextual circumstances of the creative act, if utilized in a solution, would feature extratextual elements such as 1939, Bob Kane and so forth. If the Meinongian attempts to attach some significance to the extratextual, it will be ad hoc. Extratextual considerations are theoretically superfluous to the Meinongian perspective and cannot play the fundamental role that they do in Thomasson's Creationist account. This should not, however, be interpreted as ignoring the extratextual variable in a Meinongian solution altogether, but again, we will return to this matter later on.

Despite the attractiveness of The Bat-atom proposal and the likelihood that some form of it is as close to a solution as my investigation could hope to produce, this proposal has several obstacles to overcome. The most pressing technical hurdle of Wolterstorff's approach, as raised by Thomasson, is to determine what is and is not an essential property of

a character. If this cannot be determined, as she maintains that it cannot, this solution will lead to absurd implications and invariably fail to accomplish its intended goal.

Unfortunately, Wolterstorff offers next to nothing in the way of elaborating on how we might decide what is and is not an essential property, leaving the decision solely to our intuitions. Since Wolterstorff did not have The Batman character in mind when he conceived of this approach, he likely thought our intuitions would suffice. Even if an intuitive approach would work for characters that have appeared in only one work or a reasonably small quantity of literature, it is of little help with respect to characters such as The Batman. The problem with The Batman character is that the number of publications is so large that the determination of what is and is not essential to the character is no longer even remotely intuitive. Of course, to say that there is such a large quantity of literature on The Batman presupposes that The Batman appears in all the publications, but at the same time, we are not yet in a position to claim otherwise and omit certain publications.

Let us begin by considering The Batman character described in *Detective Comics #27*. I have good reason to doubt that this Batman could serve as an adequate template. First, as the comic book medium has demonstrated, one issue is often a section of a larger story-arc, which may in turn be part of an indefinitely long story. Hence to decide what is and is not essential to a character might require that the story actually ends, even if what turns out to be essential did not require the story to end. Second, the story's end may never be reached and even if it does, additional stories might still be possible (a problem that we will discuss heavily later on). As such, The Batman described in *Detective Comics #27* was already a component of a larger character that was, to some degree, mapped out by Bob Kane and anyone else involved, even if only for several more story arcs. This suggests that essential properties that were only later introduced, such as the Death of Bruce Wayne's parents,

would have been correlated (especially according to the Meinongian perspective) with The Batman appearing in *Detective Comics #27*, prior to their publication and disclosure to the readers.

Consequently, it is uncertain whether The Batman in *Detective Comics* #27 was anything more than what was presented or was a component of one particular maximal component activated by Bob Kane. Even though we could technically use the nonexistent object represented by The Batman appearing in *Detective Comics #27*, the Meinongian would have to concede that this is not necessarily *The* Batman activated by Bob Kane. Furthermore, if Bob Kane did have a larger character mapped out, then to use only the character that is described in *Detective Comics #27* may very well undermine the intended application.

The next major concern with using The Batman in *Detective Comics #27* is the notion of dual identities and whether someone other than Bruce Wayne could be The Batman, something we have witnessed through subsequent publications, but is also a concern that one could extrapolate solely from *Detective Comics #27*. If so, then we would have to consider the possibility that The Batman and Bruce Wayne are distinct. Removing Bruce Wayne, however, I believe only serves to weaken our intuition regarding The Bat-atom solution. I am inclined to reject a separation of Bruce Wayne from The Batman not because of a personal preference or even because it is necessarily correct, but because we appear to have the tools necessary to easily accommodate the substitutes. During the brief episodes in which someone temporarily (emphasis on the temporarily) filled in for Bruce Wayne, we could potentially give them distinct, even if only watered down, names such as "The New Batman" or "The Third Batman" and retain Kripke's notion of a rigid designator such that reference to The Batman is also and is only reference to Bruce Wayne. Moreover, the substitutes are also distinct fictional characters, the names of which we could easily prefix or

suffix to The Batman name. Alternatively, if The Batman is not a rigid designator, I could redirect the focus of my investigation away from The Batman and onto Bruce Wayne; such a move will have the benefit of including his tenure as The Batman. Moreover, other characters who have temporarily taken up the role of The Batman are then no longer even a concern to my investigation. Either way, we are not likely to reach a definitive conclusion on this matter since it requires assessment of matters beyond my scope of investigation.

The problem of whether Bruce Wayne is or is not essential to The Batman's identity serves well to flesh out the importance of Thomasson's criticism. Thomasson maintains that if we set the common denominator for essential properties too low, then we run the risk of stripping characters of their individuality. This could result in many unrelated fictional works all containing the same component character and mistakenly identifying all the characters as the same. For instance, if we attempt to keep The Batman's identity the most accommodating, given all that has apparently transpired, then we might propose something like: a man, physically fit, fights injustice and operates under disguise. This will inadvertently depict many fictional characters, ranging from other superheroes such as Aquaman or The Flash to the more "literary" type characters such as Dumas' Dantès.[99]

Of course, we also want to think of a fictional character's identity as consisting of more than just vague and generic properties, but properties and events that are exclusive to that particular story (a brief salute to Wolterstorff's intuitive resort). But to go in the opposite direction of minimizing essential properties is not necessarily any more promising. Thomasson maintains that to go in this direction runs the risk of setting the common denominator too high, thereby only hindering the number of possible stories and interpretations. The inclusion of too many properties, however, is less problematic than

[99] Dantès is the central protagonist in Alexander Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo.*

including too few. Since works generally tend to fall into various genres, such as mystery, science-fiction, the comic book medium and so forth, these genres will impose natural and reasonable boundaries for certain characters, even if those boundaries cannot be clearly defined. Nonetheless, Thomasson's concern is duly noted since such boundaries may nevertheless prove too prohibitive. Hence, the more properties we include in The Bat-atom, the fewer the number of possible interpretations, which could even go so far as to exclude the use of the character in certain works that would otherwise obviously not. If we suppose The BoC is *The* Batman (as I have already suggested some reason to do so), such that most, if not all, of the properties and events are essential to it, then this will possibly rule out most, if not all, the tangents as containing The Batman character.

The last possibility is a "family resemblance" approach in which we identify The Batman not by a small static set of properties, but instead by a chain of overlapping properties. The idea is that the character in two adjacent stories, A and B, will have some properties in common with one another. In turn, the subsequent story, C will have some properties in common with B, even though it might not have any in common with A. The overlap allows us to maintain that it is the same character in all three works, A, B and C. This relation can also be carried on indefinitely, regardless of what may happen to the character 5000 publications later. While this relation serves well to identify The BoC from story arc to story arc, it is problematic for the tangents. Moreover, as Thomasson argues, the chain of overlapping properties could eventually result in the inclusion of other fictional characters being identified as The Batman and similarly the exclusion of certain permutations, such as those represented by the tangents. For instance, if we begin with The Batman in *Detective Comics #27* and replace one property in every subsequent story, eventually it could yield a character with a different name, different occupation, and so far removed from the original

story that we could eventually be talking about a Raskolnikov when we mean to be talking about The Batman.

Because we have no means to determine what is and is not essential, at least this is what Thomasson would have us believe, she concludes that Wolterstorff's proposal for intertextual identity fails. I believe this conclusion however, is a little premature. Thomasson's criticism demonstrates that Wolterstorff's position, as conceived, is insufficient. The "absurd consequences" that follow from either setting the bar too low or too high are not necessarily the result of a conceptual flaw, but the result of our failure to set the bar at all. Presumably, if this bar can be set, most, if not all, of Thomasson's objections could be overruled. Hence Wolterstorff's proposal fails to provide necessary and sufficient intertextual identity conditions, but only because his account is underdeveloped rather than having what might constitute a conceptual flaw. Naturally, to set the bar is easier said than done and I am certainly not one to solve this matter, but I am also not convinced that it is impossible. Nevertheless, we should not dismiss the gravity of Thomasson's criticism since Wolterstorff's solution cannot take flight without overcoming it.

Like I said, I am not sure how we could go about deciding what is and is not an essential property, although whatever the various proposals might entail, it is not likely to stray too far from Bob Kane's initial description of the character. However, at the very least, I think we could determine some of the nonessential properties and omit them. Perhaps some nonessential properties could be what I will call "ambient properties." Ambient properties are properties that I believe are exclusively "artistically" motivated, but are of no real significance to the plot. For instance, an author might describe what a character is eating, wearing or perhaps even something more significant such as where the character lives, etc. However, the purpose of these types of passages is not to advance the plot, or tell

us something fundamental about the character, but to enhance the work with symbolism, to establish mood or atmosphere, or simply to provide a richer and more immersive reading experience.

There could also be some flexibility with respect to what might be an essential property. If a character in a sequel lacks a property that was essential to it in the previous work, but a reasonably good explanation is offered as to why the character no longer has this essential property, such as when Bruce Wayne in *TDKR* temporarily retires from his Batman duties and "is no longer The Batman," the link to the essential properties remains, as does the essential property's correlation with the character. Recall how I had reinforced Parsons' notion of the maximal account by suggesting how the Meinongian position can explain property modification. Presumably, if an essential property is correlated with a character it remains so, even if the character is later described without that property. The problem only occurs when a story is written and no explanation is offered as to why the essential property is no longer a part of the character, or there is a failure to mention an essential property that could not otherwise be assumed.

However, these considerations are but a small step in the right direction. Even if we can safely remove trivial properties and explain some missing essential properties some of the time, to determine what is and is not essential is a formidable challenge. Moreover, Thomasson would argue that such considerations take intertextual identity conditions beyond a properties-exclusive approach to include extratextual considerations, a matter I will consider separately. Regardless, I believe that even if we do manage to determine what is and is not essential to a character, there are other problems that make Wolterstorff's position unattractive and which may in fact lead to the genuine demise of his approach.

First, if a character is defined by a nucleus of static properties, then, as far as sequels and additional stories are concerned, it does not appear possible to add properties to a character in any meaningful way. If *The* Batman's identity is simply The Bat-atom, then the introduction of any subsequent property will be irrelevant and nonessential to the character's identity. Consequently, the very idea of developing a larger, evolving character appears prohibited by Wolterstorff's approach.

While this concern does not apply to the tangents, it does apply to The BoC. Let us temporarily suspend the tangents and assume that The BoC is the only Batman character and hence *The* Batman. Obviously, we still need intertextual identity conditions for The BoC and The BoC's reoccurring appearances in many other DC titles. Indeed, the very nature of an ongoing character and the possibility of additional stories necessarily require some sort of intertextual identity conditions. The problem with Wolterstorff's proposal is that nothing beyond, say, what is described in *Detective Comics #27* is essential to The Batman.

Wolterstorff's proposal will also trivialize the need for consistent story telling. If any subsequent story is not essential to the character, then a subsequent story need not adhere to any of the properties or events exclusive to any of the previous stories in the series. The problem with a sequel,[100] one that intends to build upon the previous story and character, is that a sequel's maximal component might have essential properties beyond what is required by The Bat-atom. This strikes me as a necessary condition for a sequel, at least a sequel that intends to continue the previous story. This also strikes me as something that could become retroactively problematic. Consider a sequel somewhere in the future of the series, call it S+n. Furthermore, suppose that, for whatever reason, character X in S+n-1 has a set of properties that are deemed nonessential to its identity. Now suppose that S+n refers to and

[100] Technically, the tangents represent a type of sequel, but we will delve into this more in the coming section.

builds upon this nonessential set of properties from S+n-1 such that they become essential to S+n. If so, it could retroactively make essential the previous story's nonessential properties and events.

The "proper" sequel and very idea of an ongoing character appears to require much more, at least in terms of properties, than what would result from Wolterstorff's proposal. Furthermore, the relationship between all the stories in the series is much more intimately connected than Wolterstorff's position would allow. As a result, to satisfy what is entailed by an ongoing character—what has ideally occurred with The BoC—does not appear possible if we identify a character solely by a small static set of properties.

The next problem with Wolterstorff's solution is the multitude of distinct maximal components. If each subsequent story's maximal component (tangents included) is indeed distinct, then each maximal component, such as the one in *GBG, TDKR*, and the as yet to be determined maximal component, The BoC, must have at least one mutually exclusive essential property in order to qualify as such. After all, if the properties are nonessential, they will not be constituent of the character's identity. Furthermore, this relation will not be symmetric with The Bat-atom. Any of one particular maximal component's exclusive essential properties will not be essential to The Bat-atom. The question is then what to make of all the maximal components?

First, the uniqueness of each maximal component could make intratextual and intertextual identity conditions separate pursuits, given that some properties which are intratextually essential are not necessarily intertextually essential. Hence, the determination of what is and is not an essential property of any given component or maximal component also seems to require that we first specify whether we are making intratextual or intertextual identity claims. If The Batman's identity is defined by The Bat-atom, then the intratextual

identity of each tangent's maximal component will not be relevant.[101] On the other hand, if the maximal components are indeed distinct, then their essential properties remain intratextually relevant. This has one last unwanted implication that I would like to consider.

If Wolterstorff's approach is adopted, then any reference to *The* Batman is technically reference to The Bat-atom. What then do we make of reference to *The* Batman's nonessential properties, properties which will technically make up all but the entire Bat-catalogue? The danger is a case of mistaken reference, to refer to a subsequent story's maximal component as *The* Batman, when *The* Batman is supposed to refer to nothing more than The Bat-atom. To refer to any events or properties that are not essential to The Bat-atom is not to refer to *The* Batman, but to whatever distinct maximal component to which the properties and events are essential. Moreover, it is somewhat daft to say that *The* Batman even has nonessential properties without implying that they are somehow a part of The Batman's identity!

The problem of referring to the Batman character is that The Batman has been around long enough that it is well imbedded in most cultures. Hence, most individuals have some basic knowledge of the character, even without ever having read a single publication. As initially conceived, Wolterstorff's Bat-atom would do well as the sole object of everyone's reference. However, in each Batman story, there are technically two characters, The Bat-atom and the maximal component that is tied to that particular story. Unfortunately, both are called The Batman, even though *The* Batman is supposed to refer only to The Bat-atom. Consequently, reference appears to implode if The Batman name now refers to many objects

[101] This makes The BoC a rather peculiar character because the distinction between intratextual and intertextual becomes muddled. Given that one work can span several novels, or a single work split into multiple novels, it appears as though it could be classified as either intratextual or intertextual. Note, that unlike the tangents, which we can safely say are distinctively an intertextual concern, it is not so obvious with The BoC. Consequently, if intratextual and intertextual identities are indeed distinct pursuits, evaluation of The BoC appears stuck somewhere in between the two, possibly to be thought of as a type of hybrid.

and thereby ceases to be a rigid designator. This concern will be alleviated by a number of the tangents, the maximal components of which have been suffixed with the particular earth/universe in which the story takes place, although some do not enjoy this luxury. Moreover, there is still the nasty problem of The BoC. Presumably, while The BoC is intended to be one character, we could at least segregate it into its epochal and DCU altering divisions, but even taken in isolation, each division contains too much character for Wolterstorff's proposal to be properly implemented.

I believe that Wolterstorff's proposal is now more thoroughly assessed. First, there are the extremely difficult obstacles to overcome simply to get Wolterstorff's approach off the ground. Even if someone could establish how essential properties are determined, there are conceptual worries with how Wolterstorff's position could deal with character development. Yes, The Bat-atom could capture the tangents, but not The BoC. And even if we do treat The BoC as just another tangent, there are many sequels to this tangent that demand considering character development. Let us turn then to consider how Meinongian intertextual identity conditions would need to be constructed in light of the obstacles demonstrated by a larger, ongoing character.

2.5 The Batman of Continuity

We turn now to consider the lengths to which the Meinongians would have to go to develop intertextual identity conditions that capture the future exploits of a fictional character as constituent of their identity, as opposed to their trivialization under The Bat-atom proposal. In this section, I will do my utmost to focus exclusively on The BoC, as this was DC Comics attempt to develop an ongoing, "consistent" story about "one" fictional character. To this end, I will need to discuss the tangents alongside The BoC, but initially

only for expository purposes. Whether the tangents can be amended with this approach I will consider in due course.

In the development of a larger character, the most prominent obstacle faced by the Meinongian is that the addition of even just one seemingly trivial property to the nonexistent object, which is represented by the maximal component from the previous work, will entail that the sequel contains a distinct nonexistent object. For instance, suppose that fictional character X appears in work A and is correlated with a set of properties C. According to Parsons and Wolterstorff, C = X; that is, in the case of one work, a fictional character's identity is just the properties by which it is described in that work.[102] Now suppose a sequel, A1, is written such that X, in virtue of appearing in A1, is now represented by the nonexistent object that is correlated with C+C1. Obviously, the nonexistent object that appears in A1 is distinct from that which appears in A. Thus, if the Meinongians would like to maintain that it is indeed the same character in both works, then they must claim that the larger character C+C1 was that which appeared in A.

This approach primitively resembles my intuitive suggestion to extend Parsons' *maximal account* and now Wolterstorff's *maximal component* across multiple works. From Chapter One, recall my explanation of how Parsons' account could accommodate intratextual property change, given that each description theoretically represents a distinct nonexistent object. To reiterate, the idea is that the character is *predetermined*, or correlated with all the properties that are described by story's end, but prior to any actualization of the text (even prior to its activation by the author for that matter). Hence any change, as described in the text, should not be interpreted as a literal change, i.e. the adding/subtracting of properties, but rather the revealing of previously undisclosed information. Naturally, if

[102] Wolterstorff's will require that all the properties are essential.

sequels are, in part, a continuation of the same story and character, then we could potentially develop a parallel modification for intertextual circumstances. Stories end will simply be the last entry, AN, in the series and the maximal component X will be correlated with and identified by all the properties determined by C+C1+...CN from the many sequels A1+A2...AN.

To extend the maximal component also mirrors a proposal offered by Maria Reicher.[103] Reicher, using Sherlock Holmes as her example, suggests that we treat all the literature on a character as one massive work,

> Suppose we treat the whole series of literary works as a single literary work and speak only of the Holmes of the whole work (joined up out of what we normally take to be distinct literary works). Then, the Holmes of each partial work is a logical part of the Holmes of the whole series, and we can reasonably speak of the whole Holmes as appearing (in part) in each of the partial stories.[104]

Unfortunately, Reicher's proposal extrapolates from the relatively mundane and uncontroversial example of Sherlock Holmes. Such an example consists of one author, writing a relatively small number of works and, who, due to his current ontological status, cannot compose any additional works. This is again, largely an appeal to our intuitions. In circumstances where there is only one author, who intended to and succeeded in writing several works about the same character, and about which there are not or could not be any additional works, Reicher's proposal seems adequate. However, in her earnestness, Reicher may have failed to consider the many obstacles indicative of The Batman character. Thus, such a proposal lacks the elaboration required to accommodate the implications which arise

[103] Thomasson mentions Reicher's work as offering this approach and considers it supplementary to that developed by Wolterstorff. However, given that Reicher's work is in German, I can only offer Thomasson's translation and paraphrase of her position, as opposed to a probably much deserved explication.
[104] Thomasson, Amie. *Fiction and Metaphysics,* pg. 61

from multiple authors, tentative or possible[105] sequels and the tangents. Hence, from here on, I will do my best to speculate about the many amendments required to enrich Reicher's proposal in an attempt to account for more complex characters and also to contend with the criticisms that exploit her apparently sparse and short sighted strategy.

Ideally, multiple authors would not alter the conceptual framework of our proposed solution. Similar to instances in which one author writes multiple works, in conjunction with the intratextual qualification made above, each subsequent author's work is uncovering rather than adding properties to the character. Given that the author cannot feature at all in the identity of the text or the fictional character, the fictional character X represented by the nonexistent object C+C1+...CN remains the same fictional character regardless of who composed each of the individual works A, A1...AN. The identity of fictional character X should then remain largely independent of the extratextual peculiarities that are introduced by multiple authors. Indeed, this is the line of defence that I will ultimately attempt to hold.

Again, this line of defence is in stark contrast with Thomasson's Creationist account, which fundamentally anchors the identity of each work and, by extension, the identity of each fictional character, to its particular author and the circumstances of its creation. Once each subsequent work in the series is created, it is no longer possible for that work to have been composed by anyone else. Even if someone, ignorant of both the original work and the sequel, happens to produce the exact same sequence of words as the sequel, it will necessarily be distinct. As I will discuss extensively later on, the Creationist now has the luxury of incorporating the historical and intentional relationship between the two works into the criteria for intertextual identity, which the Meinongian cannot. More to the point,

[105] Possible sequels should not be confused with actual published works that claim to be sequels. Possible sequels should be thought of works that could be written such as a sequel to *Crime and Punishment Pt. 2, Grapes of Wrath Pt. 2,* etc.

since there is no predetermined larger character under the Creationist perspective or even the need for one, the larger character concern, if a concern at all, will be a much different monster.

However, simply because there is no necessary connection between the author and identity of the text, it should not be regarded as entirely dismissing the role of the authors from a Meinongian solution. If we want to allow for the possibility of different authors to compose sequels, then it is obvious that they must all somehow write about the same nonexistent object. This is much easier said than done. At the very least, it cannot be done without demanding certain concessions from both the author of the original work and any author who attempts to compose a sequel. Moreover, these concessions will not be exclusive to The Batman or the comic book medium, but might have to apply to all fictional discourse to which sequels have been or could possibly be written.

In short, the phenomenon of multiple authors is a collaborative process. If there is no such collaboration, it will not be possible to ensure that the many authors are uncovering properties of the same total character. The metaphysical hazard is that any one of the authors either accidentally or intentionally uses the nonexistent object, C1, C12, or whichever one happens to be correlated with nothing more than the properties of their individual work, A1, A12 and so forth. Furthermore, this collaborative effort is necessary given that the authors are attempting to perpetuate an ongoing story about the same fictional character in contrast to, say, the intended function of the tangents.

The need for collaboration among the authors is a concern alluded to in Thomasson's criticism of Reicher's proposal. Thomasson notes that Reicher's proposal, as formulated, requires that we have some working definition of what constitutes a sequel, without which, we supposedly have some rather undesirable possibilities,

> Clearly we need good criteria for whether or not different works are to be united as sequels and counted as single "whole" series. Otherwise, I could equally well set together *Hamlet, Tom Sawyer* and *A Study in Scarlet* and count Hamlet, Tom, and Holmes as being the same character in virtue of all forming parts of the same total character. Note that one cannot rule out such combinations merely by stipulating that the total character cannot encode contradictory properties (being a Dane and being an Englishman), for often one and the same character is ascribed contradictory properties in works that are genuinely part of the same series, as Watson is in the Holmes stories.[106]

I must stress that, in addition to Thomasson's criticism of Reicher's approach, there is a rather contentious issue embedded in Thomasson's criticism. First, however, let us consider the matter at hand. Thomasson is keen to observe that, as formulated, Reicher's approach is question begging. Given Reicher's shallow account, it might be somewhat uncharitably, but also prudently, perceived as a *top to bottom* approach; to suspend determination of the fictional character's identity until the aggregate work is completed and then retroactively claim that each of the previous works contained partial descriptions or represented components of the same total character or maximal component. But to include a particular work as forming part of the maximal component presupposes that the same character, or, at least, an essential part of the same character, appears in that particular work. Hence, prior to a victory for the Reicher camp, we require assessment of what constitutes a sequel, in order to determine which works to include in or exclude from the aggregate literature; in other words, to track the character from the *bottom up*. Without such parameters, we run the risk, not only of producing such chimerical entities as Thomasson's example, but to wrongly assume that the same character has persisted throughout all the publications.

Thomasson's concern translates well into several of our concerns with The Batman character as well. While The BoC is intended to be the same character, the character's "story" is supposedly not exclusive to one title, but virtually every other DC title, many of

[106] Ibid pg. 61

which are no longer in publication and many more of which are not even primarily about The Batman! To include The BoC's appearances from the various other titles, as forming part of the maximal component, presupposes that these appearances are, in fact, The BoC character and not nuanced but distinct characters. We must also take into consideration whether the many revisions and DCU altering events were successful in perpetuating The BoC or whether such obvious and deliberate manipulations mark the introduction of new and distinct characters. Failure to do so would also render The BoC chimerical,[107] albeit less obvious and certainly less appalling than Thomasson's. Moreover, if new characters did emerge at various times throughout the course of the publications, then referring to The Batman character once again implodes.

To have some parameters by which to establish a work as a *proper* sequel and hence a continuation of the same character, also suggests that it could serve as the basis for intertextual identity conditions. As a result, we may also have the means by which to identify a fictional character from story to story, possibly then without the need for Reicher's total character hypothesis. However, as I have maintained, in order to provide the best possible defence of a Meinongian based solution, we need to retain some form of the total character hypothesis, otherwise the introduction of new properties, with each subsequent work, will necessarily result in the activation and use of a new and distinct fictional character each and every time a sequel is written.

The contentious issue embedded in Thomasson's example is her claim that fictional characters can encode contradictory properties. I think it is reasonable to assume that Thomasson's chimera was intended to rouse two basic intuitions: 1) that all three characters are *obviously* distinct and 2) together they *obviously* do not form the total character as

[107] I do not mention the tangents here because they pose a different kind of concern. We are presently looking at the ongoing story of the "same" character as opposed to just some arbitrary use of the character.

suggested. To fortify her claim, Thomasson contrasts her chimera with the fictional character, Watson, who is encoded with contradictory properties, i.e. being both an Englishman and a Dane. In spite of Watson's dual ancestry, I believe Thomasson's use of Watson was intended to rouse another intuition, 3) that Watson is *obviously* the same character. Ironically however, it is now Thomasson's example which is question begging, for what is to say that the English-Watson and Danish-Watson are, in fact, the same character?

It appears as though Thomasson, like Reicher, has wrongly assumed the adequacy and safety of the Holmes example. I am not sure that there is anything unique to the Holmes example that permits Thomasson to maintain her point. Perhaps Thomasson assumed that the many Holmes' stories belong to the same series (and thereby also contained the same fictional character) in virtue of having only one author. To be entirely fair, to assume that Watson is in fact the same character is probably as safe an assumption as one could hope to make. Nevertheless, I do not believe sameness is guaranteed in the case of Watson, especially considering how The Batman character has magnified such problems which, in turn, question even the identity of such characters as Watson.

I do not believe that a series of works, in virtue of having only one author, is sufficient to claim that the same character appears in all the works. Of course, the BoC has had a relatively large number of creative teams that have supposedly contributed to the same character (to varying degrees of success and quality, I might add) that may, somehow, appear less authentic than if there was only one author composing all the works. But what could be the basis for this claim? In short, the concerns that can arise from multiple authors, such as contrived storytelling, contradictions, revisions, fundamental modifications and so forth, could just as easily result from the same author. Furthermore, if contradictory property ascription is permitted, then an author could change not only the race of the character but

also the sex, the species and so on. For instance, it would have allowed Doyle to make Watson female for one particular story, a dog in another and so on. Nor, according to Thomasson's example, would Doyle necessarily have been required to explain such contradictions (as contrived as that explanation might have to be). Nor could we necessarily hope to grade types of contradictions, being a dog and human is as much a contradiction as being an Englishman and a Dane. It would appear then, that for contradictory property ascription to be permissible, the author must have some final word on the matter. The question is then why should the original author be allowed to offer such blasphemies, but not subsequent authors that attempt to use the same character?

Given Thomasson's Creationist presuppositions, she may be inclined to think or have to admit that an author somehow has greater control over their creation; after all, Holmes and Watson are Doyle's "creations." As a result, some degree of ownership or artistic control could permit the author some liberties with inconsistent property ascription. For instance, an author may have initially been forced to alter a character for such reasons as publisher's demands, abridged versions of their work, or censorship, which, under ordinary circumstances, the author would have not and which, at some later time, was even permitted to restore to the intended version. Even more to Thomasson's credit, it does appear counterintuitive that Doyle would create an entirely new character, of which the only distinguishing feature is ancestry. Regardless, even in cases such as Doyle, when a single author writes multiple works, works which supposedly contain the same character, I do not think Thomasson's claim is necessarily guaranteed. Furthermore, it is likely to depend, in part, on whether we adopt Meinongian or Creationist presuppositions.

If we adopt a Meinongian framework, multiple authors could ultimately[108] be irrelevant. Recall how I had formulated the skeleton of the Meinongian solution. If two or more authors collaborate, then it seems very reasonable that they could just as easily use the same nonexistent object in their respective works. Hence, a subsequent author's use of a character, while potentially more problematic is not necessarily any less authentic than instances in which there is only one author.

The above discussion, in turn, does not guarantee that sameness of character persists in virtue of a work belonging to the same series. To the contrary, the number of unrelated stories, revisions, evolution and contradictory properties correlated with The Batman has roused our intuitions in the opposing direction as well, to suggest 4) that there could be multiple characters at work even within the same series. Furthermore, The BoC supposedly frequents many other DC titles, not all of which are "Batman" titles, but are nevertheless intended to be appearances of the same character. Moreover, recall my analogy of the tangents to The Twilight Zone. The many episodes, generally, had nothing to do with the previous or subsequent episodes; each episode had unrelated plots and characters. Hence to belong to the same series, in some instances, does not even have anything necessarily to do with characters or plot. Consequently, in virtue of belonging to the same series, I do not think will necessarily guarantee that it is the same character.

Despite these concerns, we do remain more inclined to believe that the two Watsons are, somehow, the same character, as opposed to Thomasson's Sawyer/Hamlet/Holmes Chimera. Similarly with The Batman, despite encoding numerous contradictory properties in virtue of the mistakes, some of the revisions, and obviously the tangents as well, our

[108] This is not to say that multiple authors is not a problem, especially given that I have said it might be. However, the question under the Meinongian framework is whether the same nonexistent object is used and this, to some degree, makes the user of the nonexistent object arbitrary.

intuitions, although conflicted, do also pull in the direction of sameness.[109] Moreover, it is the sameness of character from story to story that we are ultimately trying to resolve and thereby amend such peculiarities as inconsistent property ascription and contrived storytelling. Regardless, Thomasson's claim, that fictional characters can encode contradictory properties, is not necessarily true and along with it, possibly the need for parameters, such as those provided by the concept of a sequel, in order to determine intertextual identity conditions.

Reicher and the Meinongians appear to be temporarily off the hook. In fact, the Meinongians might now even possess a trump card, for they could simply maintain that fictional characters cannot encode contradictory properties. Thus, in spite of his best intentions, Doyle used two distinct characters within the same series. However, as the tangents demonstrate, this position is not without its own problems. Moreover, it is presently uncertain as to whether or not the Meinongians will be forced to play this card.

The question is then, where could we hope to draw the line on the number or possibly the type of inconsistent properties or the magnitude of contrived storytelling? Unfortunately, I must leave this as an open question. Naturally, if we admit to the possibility of fictional characters encoding contradictory properties, things can very quickly spiral out of control. For instance, I could write a story in which I import Raskolnikov and make him a female, fire-breathing, space alien. Conversely, if we do not allow any inconsistent property ascription whatsoever, it could effectively exclude the tangents and, possibly, some portion of The BoC from the Bat-catalogue. Moreover, it would not allow an author to modify the character in any fundamental way, such as what Doyle did with Watson. Naturally, both extremes are equally undesirable.

[109] This should not be interpreted as pulling more in favour of sameness than distinctiveness only that our intuitions pull in both directions.

2.6 The concept of a sequel

In spite of Thomasson's question begging attempt to demonstrate Reicher's question begging, I am not entirely convinced that it detracts from Thomasson's claim that we need some criteria by which to determine whether a work is part of the same series or not, as the character and the series are, more often than not, inextricably linked. In fact, while the peculiarities of The Batman character may have called into question the validity of Thomasson's criticism, they also appear to support her concern. Consequently, given that different characters could be at work within the same series demands that we consider the concept of a sequel, not only because it might just be the nature of sequels to produce distinct characters each and every time, but if there is a solution to intertextual identity, the sequel, for better or worse, will play an integral role. The phenomenon of the sequel is, after all, one of the primary motivations for my investigation of intertextual identity. Moreover, to extend the maximal component, as we initially set out to do, and to further amend Reicher's approach from the ground up, at least requires us to consider what makes a sequel a sequel and not just another work that happens to contain the same fictional character.

Not surprisingly, to determine the exact conditions under which a work would qualify as a "genuine" sequel is much more intricate and complicated than one might initially suspect and something we have thus far taken for granted. To this end, Thomasson introduces a necessary but not sufficient condition for a work to qualify as such,

> We can at least specify an important necessary condition C for the identity of characters x and y appearing in literary works K and L respectively: The author of L must be competently acquainted with x of K and intend to import x into L as y…Although this criterion should not strictly be considered sufficient, it should (combined with sensible and careful textual analysis) provide a very good benchmark for whether or not we can reasonably claim that two characters are the same.[110]

[110] Ibid pg. 67

Thomasson's condition hardly strikes me as contentious, nor can much be criticized of a condition which in itself claims to be insufficient. For instance, simply because an author *intends* to import a character does not guarantee that the author actually succeeds in importing the character. However, if a character is to be successfully imported and a sequel written, it would appear that the author must intend to do so.

The notion of competent acquaintance is also rather uncontroversial, but something I do find a little bothersome. Thomasson leaves the notion of competent acquaintance rather vague, "the kind of acquaintance that would enable the author to be a competent user of the name x (supposing x were named) as it is used in K."[111] To be competently acquainted with a character that appears in only one work, I would imagine is a trivial affair; it could simply amount to having read the previous work and maybe understanding some of the author's motives behind writing the work. But what could we possibly say for characters such as The BoC? Assuming that the same character has persisted, ideally since *Detective Comics #27*, according to my formulation above, a rough approximation of the nonexistent object that is presently represented by The BoC might be something like, C+C1+...C10,000+...CN. Hence as the number of sequels begins to multiply, we cannot continue to expect every subsequent author to have read all the prior works and have knowledgeable of everything that has thus far transpired; this is simply too demanding and unrealistic. This also suggests that competent acquaintance should not be uniform for every subsequent author, but possibly take its cue from a "family resemblance" or chain of overlapping properties approach. Moreover, to be presently competently acquainted with The BoC, presupposes not only that the identity of the character has, to some degree, been established, but has also persisted until the present.

[111] Ibid pg. 67

There is, however, something lurking deep within Thomasson's condition that might eventually spell the demise of the Meinongian position. But before I can determine whether or not this is indeed the case, I must consider at length one particular ambiguity left behind by Thomasson's condition and its pertinence to a Meinongian based solution.

Technically, Thomasson's condition will apply to all subsequent use of a character. This will include prequels, bridging events[112] and the tangents. Intuitively, I am reluctant to classify all subsequent stories that claim to use the same character as genuine sequels. For instance, since the tangents do not perpetuate the previous story, despite allegedly exploiting use of the same fictional character, they are not constituent of a larger story and character. Moreover, the conceptual motivation behind the tangent story is precisely that; to liberate the character and author from some of the "restrictions" imposed by the previous story or stories. As self-contained, the tangents are not required, nor intended to be consistent with the other tangents[113] and certainly not with The BoC. The further a tangent deviates from the events of the previous story, the greater the responsibility of the creative team to explain the settings, back story and so forth; essentially the tangents "borrow" rather than "import" the character and begin the character's story anew, as opposed to developing an extension to a previous story. Consequently, subsequent use of a character will require the addition of a corollary that demands some adherence to the events and story world of the previous work. Although, given the problems assessed with The Bat-atom, I am doubtful that the two could even be properly separated in the first place.[114]

[112] By bridging event I mean filling in an undisclosed event of a fictional character that could have occurred between two works.
[113] With the exception of what is intended to be a sequel to a specific tangent.
[114] Technically since a fictional character is nothing more than a bundle of properties, perpetuating the larger story is essentially synonymous with use of the same character.

Using Wolterstorff's terminology and guidelines, we could suggest something along the following lines for a work to better qualify as a genuine sequel and better help distance them from the tangents. Since we may intuitively want to maintain that a sequel is a continuation of a story and character, a component of any subsequent work's maximal component would have to be the previous work's maximal component. Presumably, if the story is a prequel, then the relation between component and maximal component could simply be reversed. Of course, there is nothing to prevent a particular tangent from also holding this relation, but this misses the point. Given the nature of the tangents, they are not committed to hold this relation. A genuine sequel, however, should not enjoy this freedom. For instance, consider what might initially appear as an exception, such as when a story happens to bridge a gap somewhere on The BoC's timeline rather than describing The BoC's next immediate chronological event. The bridging story will have to work within the parameters set by the events both prior to and after the gap in order to do so. The tangents, on the other hand, do not have to work within these parameters given that their function is not to bridge any events, but to branch out from some point on The Batman's timeline and eventually terminate.

The tangents also further demonstrate the need for a working definition of a sequel in order to amend Reicher's total character hypothesis. With regards to The Batman, to initially ponder the total character would entail assessing all of the supposed literature on the character, which includes the tangents. However, to include the tangents in the aggregate will have the undesirable result of a character identified by an inconsistent and rather incoherent set of properties. Given my previous discussion, this may or may not be acceptable. In fact, the motivation behind the tangents may also have contributed to Thomasson's perspective on inconsistent property ascription. Nevertheless, to allow blatant contradictory property

ascription would undermine our notion of the genuine sequel, possibly without even requiring the author to give an explanation as to why things are so drastically different,[115] as fantastical as that explanation might have to be.[116] Hence, for a genuine sequel, the intentions of the author must extend beyond simply importing the character but also to further develop the same character, ideally, by maintaining consistency with the previous work's plot; essentially how The BoC is intended to function. Now strictly speaking, uncovering the larger character does not necessarily have to be done in chronological order. Thus prequels and bridging events should also be included, provided they propagate the larger story, albeit backwards or inwards. Of course, we will have to consider how the tangents might also be included, but one problem at a time.

If Thomasson's condition is applied to a Meinongian based solution, then I believe it also requires the following concession: that the author admits of some ambiguously larger character. Recall that the comic book medium is generally a serialized format; one intended to develop stories and characters that are ongoing (so long as they remain profitable). It is then reasonable to assume that Bob Kane would have conceded that additional stories would be developed (and hence the use of a larger character), well after he had ceased to actively contribute and one of which he would never be entirely knowledgeable. Given the Meinongian perspective, I believe it would be next to impossible[117] to have perpetuated The BoC thus far if Bob Kane had not admitted to using a larger character.

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[115] For instance when the DCU is revised through some cataclysmic event, this constitutes an explanation for why things are now different as opposed to Thomasson's Chimera which is without any such explanation. Of course someone could write a story and provide an explanation for why all the characters form the total character, but this issue will be addressed.

[116] For instance, the central antagonist in *COIE* is the Anti-Monitor. The Anti-Monitor is a being of negative energy that could consume "positive existence" and absorb whole universes. I believe it is safe to say that whatever the nature of these extraordinary powers, determining whether they are logically possible and their various implications is virtually impossible or at least presently beyond our present knowledge.

[117] If by accident he was wrong about the nonexistent object that he selected, although I am unsure how this could be verified. However, I will address this point later on.

If Bob Kane had not admitted to writing about some ambiguously large maximal component, one of which his contribution would only ever amount to a component,[118] then no sequels beyond Bob Kane's contribution would necessarily have been possible. By will of Bob Kane, *The* Batman character's properties would have been capped at some point C+C1+...CN-P. Any attempt to write a sequel beyond the last publication, AN-P, would have resulted in the use of a distinct nonexistent object. Bob Kane's nonexistent object would then be distinct from the one today we hope is not. This admission is not only a requirement of Bob Kane, but of everyone who has and anyone who will contribute to The BoC.

I think this admission is reasonable for serialized works such as The Batman, but it appears less certain for other fictional works, such as *Crime and Punishment*. However, there is a thought we must entertain: whether sequels to all works, past, present and future are possible. Intuitively, there do not appear to be any metaphysical criteria that prevent me from writing a sequel to, say, *Crime and Punishment*, although Dostoevsky might roll over in his grave if I did. Nevertheless, if we want to maintain that a sequel to *Crime and Punishment* is possible, then the admission of a larger character would have been required of Dostoevsky as well. The admission of a larger character might then be requisite of all authors who engage in fictional discourse. This admission should not, however, be interpreted as forming part of either the text's or character's identity, but simply that the text must necessarily contain a character with properties that are not explicitly described in that particular text. This in turn, requires an author to admit to writing about a character with more properties than what they describe in their work.

[118] Technically this will be the case regardless. Whatever Bob Kane's contribution C+C1...CN is, it is a component of some larger character C+C1+...CN+1+CN+2... However, Bob Kane's contribution is also representative of a distinct nonexistent object.

Naturally, this admission is also a cause for some concern. First, while it may seem possible that sequels to all works are possible, there is the question of whether sequels to all works *should* be possible. For example, we may want to have room for exceptions such as when an author kills off a character. Moreover, we may not want to permit sequels to certain literary masterpieces such as *Crime and Punishment*, if for nothing more than some idealized notion of artistic integrity. Third, any work about which a sequel could be written might not allow for a "total character" since fictional characters will not be ambiguously large, but infinitely large.

With regards to the first concern, again, we need to look no further than the dubious and contrived story-telling of The BoC. No matter how thoroughly an author may appear to annihilate a fictional character, it seems possible that the same author or any subsequent author can always manipulate or falsify the previous story's events in order to resurrect, rework or revise a character and thereby perpetuate indefinitely stories about the "same" character.[119] Of course, given my previous discussion, we might want to limit the extent to which subsequent works can undermine and continue to undermine previous works. After all, it is precisely this byzantine quality of The Batman stories that have pulled our intuitions in the opposing direction as well. Even so, as I have suggested, additional stories that claim to uncover the larger character can also manifest in less contrived and controversial forms, such as prequels or bridging events. Moreover, with respect to characters such as The BoC, regardless of what happens in any individual story, additional stories are simply a matter of *when* and not *if*.

Unfortunately, I can only speculate about the notion of artistic integrity. Contrived storytelling might simply be a feature that has become so common to the comic book

[119] Note that this is a distinct problem from so called "mistakes" which offer no such explanations of why things are the way they are.

medium that it is often expected and grudgingly accepted. On the contrary, to offer such fantastical explanations, many of which deliberately exploit our epistemological shortcomings, that might be required to write sequels to certain "classic" literary works, such as *Anna Karenina, War and Peace* and so forth, might not be so desirable. To that end, authors who take their work more "seriously" or engage in more *literary* type fictional discourse may not as often admit of a larger character, but perhaps, rightfully so. After all, this might be part of the reason why we have yet to see sequels to the aforementioned works. Strictly speaking, however, the admission criterion is required only if we want to permit sequels to any given work of fiction. If we do not, the admission criterion could then be used to form the framework for any exceptions, which would thereby allow us to capture such a concern as artistic integrity.

Presumably, Creationists would also want to permit the possibility of sequels. However, while the Creationist may have to make a similar concession about the possibility of future works, their perspective does not require the admission of a larger character from the authors. Since there is no larger character, properties are literally added to or subtracted from the character, but only on the advent of an additional story; prior to the sequel's creation, none of the properties are correlated with the character. Presumably then, the Creationist framework has even less in the way of restrictions that would prohibit me from writing a sequel to any work.[120] On the other hand, with the larger character admission, the Meinongian perspective does allow authors to prevent sequels. For instance, Dostoevsky could simply have said that a sequel to *Crime and Punishment* is not possible; Raskolnikov is nothing more than the character that Dostoevsky described, end of debate (and along with

[120] This is not entirely true. Technically given the continued dependence of a work on a copy of a text, knowledge of the language etc, there are circumstances under which sequels would no longer be possible. However, I do not think these exceptions necessarily detract from my claim.

it, the possibility of my blasphemous sequel). While this will prohibit sequels to any work in which the author does not admit of a larger character, it can, by the very same account, accommodate any exceptions, thereby offering a more comprehensive solution to intertextual identity.

Lastly, there is the concern that fictional characters, about which sequels are possible, are, in fact, infinitely large. The idea is that once an author admits to writing about an ambiguously large character—to which other authors may one day contribute—then there does not appear to be anything to limit the number of sequels. I fail to see how the author could admit of a larger character, but somehow impose a finite ceiling on the character. After all, the number of possible sequels is determined not by some arbitrary number of works that the author is willing to permit, but by the number of properties *actually* correlated with the character. Once an author admits of a larger character, one of which the author is not entirely knowledgeable, then the number of sequels is no longer in the hands of the author, regardless of whether it is the initial author or any subsequent author. The supposed "last" work in the series is then only ever tentatively so, or should be thought of as the most recent entry, regardless of how much time may have elapsed since its initial publication and how much more time before whatever might qualify as the next possible work in the series is published.

I'll admit that this implication is a peculiar one, but it is not likely to produce any obstacles not already possessed by fictional characters of some absurdly large, but finite size; both still require the admission of a larger character and both will have to grant the individual authors some epistemological leniency towards their knowledge of the larger character. Consequently, fictional characters, such as The Batman, and any character about which a sequel is possible, forever remain a work in progress. The admission of the

possibility of future stories and some ambiguously larger character is then a critical, dare I say, necessary condition required exclusively of the Meinongian perspective to account for sequels and the larger character.

Now technically, as intuitive as Thomasson's condition may be, it is not even necessary for a Meinongian solution. Since the identity of the fictional character is determined exclusively by the properties correlated with it, there is the possibility that an author accidentally selects that character, i.e., unintentionally and without any knowledge whatsoever of the other publications. For instance, suppose that there is a sequel A1 that meets all of our above demands (as insufficient as they may be) such as perpetuating the story, using a larger character, etc. Now suppose that in some other solar system, billions of light years away, someone composes a work, $A1^1$, which happens to be the exact same sequence of words as A1. Under Meinongian presuppositions, both works are considered the same. By contrast, under Thomasson's Creationist perspective, the works would be distinct. In other words, the Meinongian position entails that two works that might otherwise be distinguished by the circumstances of their composition and the intentions of the authors—one intentionally a sequel to a previous work and the other only accidentally so—are nevertheless the exact same work. This is where things become very interesting.

In this particular example, I am inclined to agree with Thomasson's position and say that the two works are distinct. However, if we attempt to distinguish the accidental work, $A1^1$ from the genuine work, A1 by resorting to Thomasson's necessary condition, the Meinongian solution runs the risk of extratextual contamination; contaminants which are now constituent of the text's and character's identity. If so, then a Meinongian solution to sequels is no longer possible. This difficulty constitutes the heart of Thomasson's apparent

destruction of the Meinongian perspective, that the very concept of a sequel and intertextual identity demands going beyond a purely properties based approach,

> they involve going beyond the basic principle of the abstractist position: That identity conditions can be offered on the sole basis of properties encoded by characters. For they require us to bring an historical element into the identity conditions for characters across texts: They must appear in texts historically and intentionally related to one another in the relevant way, via the later author's acquaintance with the intentions regarding the first character...although we might get satisfying identity conditions on that basis, we can do so only at the cost of abandoning the basic abstractist position that only a character's (encoded) properties are relevant for its identity. (Thomasson 62)

If the identity of a sequel necessarily includes a historical and intentional relation to the previous work, then hope has all but run out for a Meinongian based solution. I am not convinced that my forthcoming defence can adequately repel such an accusation, but, at the very least, I believe it can soften the blow.

Barring the exception of the highly improbable accidental sequel, the historical and intentional element is present in all sequels no different than individual works to which no sequels are written; every work is conceived under some spatiotemporal circumstances. The matter is whether such extratextual factors are necessary to the identity of the texts and characters. In Thomasson's Creationist position they are, in the Meinongian position they cannot be. This much remains unchanged from earlier discussions and my exposition in Chapter One. The sequel, however, is a different breed of text because an historical and intentional context emerges between texts.[121] The question is whether the Meinongians can maintain that this additional historical and intentional connection is not necessary to the identity of the text or the character.

The first saving grace in this matter is that use of the same fictional character is not guaranteed in virtue of our two works, A1 and A1[1], containing the exact same sequence of

[121] In addition to whatever other extratextual circumstances may have influenced the work.

words. Consider again our now infinitely large maximal component X,[122] constituents of which are described in work A and its sequel A1. In work A, what is explicitly detailed of the maximal component X is represented by the component character, C and in the sequel A1 it is C+C1.[123] The nonexistent object explicitly detailed in A1, however, is technically only C1, even though this is not the nonexistent object which appears in A1. It is possible then that the accidental sequel, $A1^1$ only contains the nonexistent object C1. If so, then works A1 and $A1^1$ contain distinct characters. Moreover, as I had earlier stressed, for a sequel to be possible, the author of the previous work must admit to using a larger character. Hence, A1 necessarily contains an infinitely large character. If, on the other hand, the author of $A1^1$ did not intent to write a sequel to the previous work, A, or any other work for that matter, nor admitted to writing about a larger character, then we once again have two characters that are distinct and with it, a means by which to dismiss the accidental work as a proper sequel.

Of course, if the author of the accidental work did admit of a larger character, then the possibility that both works contain the same character remains, since both C1 and C+C1 are both components of the larger character C+C1...CN. But again, even if the author of the accidental work admits to writing about a larger character, there is no guarantee that both works contain the same character. Note that C1 is not only a component of X but a component of an infinite number of other larger characters Y, W, Z and so forth. Thus the author of the accidental work may have selected C1 of Y, C1 of W or any other infinitely large character to appear in their work instead of C1 of X. Consequently, it would appear possible, under the Meinongian framework, for two otherwise identical works to contain

[122] I realize that this is inaccurate given the possibility of future stories, that "total" character or maximal component is misleading. However, even if a character is infinitely large, we can still represent it by X.

[123] Point of clarification: It is reasonable to assume that the majority of sequels do not reiterate every detail of a character from a previous work verbatim, but rather only some subset S. Thus while the official character appearing in the sequel is C+C1, it is likely to only be described as S+C1, where S < C. Consequently, the author of the accidental work at the very minimum would have used S+C1.

different nonexistent objects and if so, on this basis claim that A1 is a genuine sequel but $A1^1$ is not.

Unfortunately, the possibility remains that both works can contain the same fictional character, provided the author of the accidental work admits of a larger character. Ever the more unfortunate is that there is no way out of this pickle without adopting Thomasson's position and rendering the historical and intentional circumstances necessary to the identity of the texts and characters. However, there is still a little more we can do to reduce the magnitude of this problem.

Given the preceding discussion, the first line of defence is probability. As it stands, it is highly unlikely that two identical works will ever be independently composed. We can compound on this probability in several ways. First, not only would the two works have to be identical, but one of the works would necessarily have to be a sequel to another work. This is made less likely by what might ordinarily be perceived as the general structure of a sequel, such as passages that refer to the events of the previous work (although in much less detail), characters of which a certain amount of information is presupposed, but not reiterated, and so forth. Without a previous work to use as a springboard, the accidental sequel might, on its own, appear incoherent. More to the point, it makes the sequence of words that would constitute a sequel even more difficult to reproduce independently and accidentally as opposed to a work which is not a sequel.

Next, should these insurmountable odds somehow be defied, the possibility remains that both works do not contain the same nonexistent object. Moreover, if we take into consideration characters such as The BoC, of which there are supposedly thousands of sequels, the likelihood of an accidental work containing the same character only decreases with each subsequent sequel. With each subsequent sequel, evermore is uncovered of the

character such that it becomes all the more detailed and all the less likely that an author could accidentally presuppose all of the previous details of the character in their work.

However, if we do not want to admit of possibilities and probabilities, there is one last consolation for the Meinongian, verification. In short, we have no means by which to verify which nonexistent object is being used in the accidental work. Incidentally, this defence stems from the peculiarity of infinitely large characters. Once we admit that a fictional character is of an infinite size, we will never have a complete description of the character; there will always be additional properties correlated with the character that are not explicitly detailed. Since there is such a large quantity of properties correlated with the character that have yet to be explicitly detailed, there is no method, or at least, I cannot think of one, that would allow us to assess this portion of the character. Consequently, we will have no way by which to distinguish the character appearing in A1 from the character appearing in $A1^1$.

I think this is as much a benefit to the Meinongian cause as it is to their dismay. Obviously, we cannot dismiss the accidental work on the basis of verification alone since it would only seem to reaffirm the need for Thomasson's condition and the Creationist cause. More to the point, if we cannot verify which nonexistent object is used in $A1^1$, then the means of excluding the one work as a sequel, based on the particular nonexistent object activated, will not work. In principle, however, we do not have any means of verifying which nonexistent object is used in the intentional sequel either. Unfortunately, as nonexistent, the only means of verifying which nonexistent object is in use is exclusively determined by the text.

To this end, perhaps we can take our cue from van Inwagen and think of fictional characters not strictly as theoretical entities per se, but something more analogous to actual

theories. Consider various scientific theories. Many, if not all, scientific theories contain problems that stem from a lack of knowledge. Much of this unknown is, in part, due to theories which are a work in progress. As a work in progress, many theories are incomplete, subject to corrections, amendments, opposing perspectives, in need of additional information and even lack definitive means of verification, such as the concept of infinity in Mathematics or much in the field of Cosmology.

Furthermore, the many discoveries and works written that make up the body of knowledge in say, Mathematics, are historically and intentionally related to one another, and often influence subsequent works and discoveries. However, this historical and intentional element in no way figures into the identity of the theory or the field of Mathematics. For instance, Calculus remains Calculus despite that it was twice independently discovered, once by Newton and once by Leibniz. Similarly, if I were to independently reproduce Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, it would not make my version a distinct theory. However, the likelihood of my independently reproducing Gödel's Incompleteness Theorem, without any prior knowledge of mathematics or logic, is for all intents and purposes, impossible.

Also, consider how some ideas in Mathematics are analogous to The Batman character. An asymptotic function, for instance, is an equation that has a "limit" or a value that could be produced if the number infinity could be plugged into the equation. Similarly with The BoC, assuming we could reach infinity, then we could suggest that all of the properties correlated with the character could be known and hence the full identity of the character revealed. However, this present inability to go to infinity does not necessarily prevent us from using the character, referring to the character or necessarily identifying it, no different than using asymptotic functions, or using the number Pi and so forth.

To think of fictional characters similarly to actual theories proves advantageous for the Meinongians for several reasons. First, the character can remain identified by nothing more than the properties by which it is described. Second, it potentially allows us to slip intentionality and historical circumstances in through the back door. Indeed, intentionality and context will not figure into the identity of the fictional character, but without examining such texts, it would prove next to impossible to uncover additional information about the character. Third, the large unknown, that stems from the infiniteness of the character allows for a great deal of speculation, corrections, revisions and so forth. Creative teams can then admit of mistakes, whether they were unintentional or whether previous story elements were deliberately undermined.

To perceive fictional characters as theories also allows us to account for the tangents. What we can say of the tangents is that they represent hypothetical scenarios. The most appropriate example of this was an ongoing series by Marvel Comics Inc. entitled, *What if...*where creative teams had the freedom to write stories, such as the ramifications of a particular villain killing a superhero, what if two certain superheroes never met, and so forth. The many tangents could probably be similarly perceived. Of course, this would require assertions about the tangents to be qualified as such, but this is already done, at least by the more devoted readership, and is also sometimes made obvious by the large deviation of the tangent's plot from the other stories. Nonetheless, to treat tangents as hypothetical scenarios would allow us to maintain that it is the same Batman character in the tangents as well. Presumably, we could treat The BoC and its events as *The* Batman and have the tangents ultimately traceable back to some point on *The* Batman's timeline.

Of course, many theories have the benefit of some form of empirical verification or practical application, which fictional characters obviously do not. Nevertheless, to think

about fictional characters as theories, may allow the Meinongians to admit that the texts are historically and intentionally related to one another but that they do not necessarily factor into the identity of the text or characters. Consequently, while not necessarily supplying definitive criteria for intertextual identity, the Meinongians could maintain that the texts, which are historically and intentionally related, while not necessarily required to write about the same character, nevertheless remain the best source by which to further uncover the larger nonexistent object and thereby possibly allow them to account for the concept of a sequel.

CHAPTER 3: CONCLUSIONS, SHORTCOMINGS AND FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

3.1 Conclusions

Compared to other less popular and certainly less convoluted fictional characters such as Raskolnikov and Sherlock Holmes, The Batman truly is representative of the most exceptional type of fictional character, that is, if "fictional character" even remains the most appropriate designation. Indeed, it is not surprising that establishing a set of necessary and sufficient intertextual identity conditions proves to be as difficult a task as I have demonstrated. From a textual perspective, what makes The Batman an entity worthy of such investigation is that it provides such a vast array of exceptions and variables that one might not ordinarily consider when assessing fictional characters. Unfortunately, Thomasson and Reicher both fall victim to this. Since a fictional character could at some future time be further developed, altered or revised, it appears as though such things as sequels, tangents, multiple authors and a large number of stories, need to properly be incorporated, possibly as something distinctive of the very nature of fictional characters. Moreover, these many intricacies are likely to prove too complicated and intertwined to be properly accounted for by any one philosophical theory, if accountable at all.

Fictional characters appear to be largely amorphous entities that are ultimately subject to the whim of the author, publisher and the multitude of extratextual influences. To this end, I think that the Creationist perspective will ultimately fair better than the Meinongian, at the very least, for characters such as The Batman, but likely all fictional characters as well. The Batman character also supports the view that fictional discourse is not just an abstract sequence of words, but something influenced by many extratextual and concrete variables, such as aesthetic, economic, and cultural, to name a few. To trivialize these variables or to set their influence apart from the identity of the text and characters

strikes me as ignoring something very elemental about fiction. I have done much to consider the various amendments needed to make a Meinongian solution to intertextual identity possible, but given what it is required in order to so, such as claiming that fictional characters are infinitely large and the resulting implications, I am not entirely convinced the payoff exceeds the effort.

From a textual standpoint, the most pertinent concern for the Meinongian, as demonstrated by The Batman, is bipartite storytelling. The motive behind the BoC and the tangents each poses a unique attraction, but also unique obstacles, obstacles which are not only problematic within the respective solution, but when an attempt is made to combine the two types of storytelling under a more comprehensive solution. However, even if the hurdles that I assessed could in some way be reconciled, there are many extratextual factors that seem to require consideration and possibly even incorporation into the identity of texts and characters.

Nevertheless, the best course for the Meinongian, I believe, is something more akin to Wolterstorff's solution than to Reicher's. In light of all the types of stories and complications that result, it would appear better to just consider every creative team's contribution a nuanced but distinct character. Moreover, given how frequently the character is revised, modified, retroactively falsified, the larger character approach or the very idea of an ongoing character could be a non sequitur, rendering my defence a needless exercise in Meinongian apologetics. Consider again the introduction of The Batman of Earth-1 and Earth-2. While a more concerted effort was made to explain what happened to The Batman in the DC altering events such as *COIE*, these efforts ultimately fall victim to the same concerns created by the introduction of The Batman of Earth-1 and Earth-2. Consequently, the revisions are just as likely to have created similar concerns and possibly have also

undermined the intended use of continuity. Furthermore, if we extend this line of thought to all the literature and hence, every story-arc, mini-series, tangent, etc., all become suspect of being about distinct characters, again, giving further credence to Wolterstorff's approach, or a variation of it, and atomizing a fictional character's identity. Moreover, with more regular, literary type characters, we often do not see such a vast number of publications, extreme storytelling and manipulations. Most literary works often do not see genuine sequels by different authors, as opposed to what may amount to an unrelated use of the character by different authors. This lends further support to a Bat-atom type solution.

The primary benefit of the Creationist position, especially Thomasson's, is that it anchors fictional characters to the concrete in a much more intimate way. Thus, in addition to the properties correlated with the character, the Creationist can utilize the many extratextual elements that probably should be considered and should factor into the identity of the fictional character. While this certainly allows for a great degree of artistic freedom and interpretation, culture influence, metaphor and so forth, it renders their ontology a little dubious and unfalsifiable. For instance, the creation of Katherine Kane/Batwoman, in *Detective Comics #233,* an early love interest of Bruce Wayne/The Batman, occurred not too long after the work *Seduction of the Innocent* claimed that there was a homoerotic subtext in the earlier Batman comics.[124] This extratextual event strikes me as something necessary not only to the creation of The Batwoman character, but also the identity of The Batman and something which cannot play as significant a role in the Meinongian position. Unfortunately,

[124] There is no definitive proof that this is why Batwoman was conceived. However, there is some evidence to suggest that this was indeed the case. On pg. 85 in *Batman: A Complete History,* Les Daniels claims that the introduction of censorship with the Comics Code Authority in conjunction with Werthem's work, had a profound influence on the stories, "...for most of the next decade, Batman's writers, artists, editors, and publishers would struggle to prove that their comics were not inspiring a generation to become gay or juvenile delinquents and by overcompensating so strenuously they produced some of the strangest Batman stories ever seen...Their strategies included a proliferation of new Bat-characters designed to create a faux family atmosphere."

there is no definitive means by which to distinguish when a character remains the same character or a new character is created under the Creationist framework either, unlike the Meinongians who, in a worst case scenario, could simply draw the distinction based on properties.

3.1 Shortcomings and Further Considerations

I have but skimmed the surface as to what further considerations, intratextually, intertextually, and extratextually may be required to help advance the search for a solution. I have investigated the matter from a largely metaphysical perspective. However, additional metaphysical considerations would require greater assessment of the role properties play in identity, what types of properties we would want to count as constituent of a character's identity and so forth.

Beyond the metaphysical dimension, fiction has a large aesthetic component that would also require assessment. For instance, the illustrative dimension could presumably play a large role in the development of identity conditions exclusive to the comic book medium, although the little I did say on this subject does not entail that it will be any easier to accomplish. Furthermore, there are reasons to assess the illustrative dimension independently, in as much as it compliments or is intertwined with the textual element. For instance, the style and evolution of The Batman character has gone from the very cheesy and campy to the dark and gothic character portrayed today. I think this invariably influenced not only the style of the stories that were told, but also the direction of the character's subsequent stories and hence identity. For instance, there were certain artists, such as Neal Adams and Frank Miller, who offered revolutionary depictions that invariably influenced not

just subsequent artists, but the writers as well, influencing the types of stories and portrayal of The Batman.[125]

I am unclear what the Meinongian could make of the "artistic" contribution and subsequent influence on a fictional character. Presumably, the different depictions could also be seen as an activation or selection of very specific dimensions and relations. The larger character certainly becomes a very peculiar entity once other such variables are considered. However, I am unsure how the Meinongian might explain the relationship between the two and how they influence one another. Furthermore, this influence and relationship appears very "organic" and culturally based further removing fictional characters from the abstract and into the concrete. However, the Creationist position, being what it is, might better accommodate the artistic dimension, its contribution and influence on the evolution of the character.

There are also many literary considerations that I just briefly touched upon, such as the notion of artistic integrity, contrived storytelling and interpretation. Presumably literary considerations would also take into consideration the extratextual variables that influenced how and why the work might have been initially conceived, but also its influence on subsequent works. Again, literary elements like satire and metaphor, which often depict something concrete, are better captured by a Creationist than by Meinongian solution.

Once we begin to go beyond intra and intertextual considerations, to investigate extratextual variables, the hopes of identifying entities like as The Batman only become more problematic, but also more interesting. First, and most importantly, we cannot overlook the

[125] With their first collaborative effort, *Detective Comics #395,* Dennis O'Neil and Neal Adams were the first creative team to introduce the darker and gothic tone to both the writing and illustrations. Frank Miller cemented this style in the mini-series *TDKR* in 1986, what Les Daniels refers to as "...one of the seminal works in comic book history...this was to send a message that this was a new beginning and the style of the writing and the art was going to be quite different from the books that preceded it." Daniels, Les. *Batman: The Complete History,* pg. 147-157

massive cash cow that is The Batman character. Thus, much of what has transpired needs to be assessed from a somewhat cynical perspective, i.e. as the milking of a product for all its worth. The many revisions, tangents and so forth should probably, in part, be seen as trying to keep the character and stories relatively "fresh" in order to sustain readership and ultimately profits. Of course, there is an *art* to this as well. In addition, there are the many other artistic mediums and merchandising of the character such as film, television, video games and so forth, such that the identity of The Batman character probably is not, exclusively, an intra or intertextual concern.

There is also the trickier notion of dual identities and hence the psychological aspect to such a character. Obviously, many consider The Batman and Bruce Wayne to be the same fictional character, although many have also questioned whether it is Bruce Wayne or The Batman that represents the disguise. If we once again consider how the character has evolved over time, a distinction between the man and the cape and cowl begins to take form. This theme has also been explored in various story-arcs in which someone else held the Bat-mantle and made reference to The Batman's legacy. If Bruce Wayne can pass on the Mantle of The Bat, and if we are trying to discover The Batman's identity and then not necessarily Bruce Wayne's, then we are no longer talking about a fictional human character, but instead a fictional occupation, legacy, symbol against injustice and so forth. Moreover, an analogous claim can be made about The Batman character transcending its fictional boundaries to become something representative of our culture and, dare I even say, our human nature.

The last question to ponder is why should we even care about the identity of fictional characters? First, they pose a very interesting obstacle both to our metaphysics and language. Existence and nonexistent are so common place in our language that we apply them almost every day, despite failing to accurately comprehend what they might actually

entail. Such problems are only exacerbated when we consider discussion of such objects in instances where they blur the distinction between what is true in *reality* as opposed to what is true in *fiction*.

Another interesting reason to pursue the topic of intertextual identity is for the purposes of copyright. For instance, an artist, by the name of Mark Chamberlain, painted a series of watercolours, depicting The Batman as a homosexual.[126] Not surprisingly, DC Comics was not too pleased and pursued legal action.[127] To my knowledge, however, The Batman/Bruce Wayne is not and never was a homosexual. Thus if we view fictional characters through a Meinongian lens, Mark Chamberlain or his lawyer could have argued that he was using a distinct nonexistent object. Through a Creationist lens, the issue is not as clear. Obviously, it was the intention of Mark Chamberlain to use The Batman character and portray the character in this fashion. To this end, it would appear as though the copyright laws would adhere closer to our Creationist intuitions than our Meinongian intuitions.

There are many contentions around what fictional characters actually are. Assuming that fictional characters' exact ontological status is determined, questions regarding types of fictional characters and the identity conditions of individual fictional characters would not necessarily be any closer to being resolved. If we consider how contentious identity conditions are for ordinary spatiotemporal objects over time, it would appear that much work would have to be done if suitable conditions for fictional characters are to be developed, let alone fictional characters as complicated as The Batman. The Batman character has, in many ways, transcended its fictional boundaries. Nevertheless, these complexities and absurdities aside, the intuition remains that there somehow remains a

[126] http://www.artnet.com/artist/424157172/mark-chamberlain.html Be forewarned that the material on this webpage is often of an explicit nature.
[127] http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/4167032.stm

singular Batman character, which has persisted through seventy years worth of publications, but is also the same character across the various mediums.

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