

# Abstract Creationism and Authorial Intention

## ABSTRACT

Abstract creationism about fictional characters is the view that fictional characters are abstract objects that authors create. I defend this view against criticisms from Stuart Brock that hitherto have not been adequately countered. The discussion sheds light on how the number of fictional characters depends on authorial intention. I conclude also that we should change how we think intentions are connected to artifacts more generally, both abstract and concrete.

## I. ABSTRACT CREATIONISM

*Abstract creationism* about fictional characters is the view that fictional characters, such as Sherlock Homes and Harry Potter, are abstract objects that authors create. The view has many proponents (e.g. Braun (2005), Kripke (2013), Salmon (1998), Schiffer (1996), and Thomasson (1999)). Stuart Brock (2010) presents a case against abstract creationism that hitherto has not been adequately countered. I will explain and rebut his case. The discussion will shed light on how the number of fictional characters depends on authorial intention. I will conclude also that we should change how we think intentions are connected to artifacts more generally, both abstract and concrete.

Let's start with background information about abstract creationism. A key advantage of the view is that it's consistent with our intuitions that the following sentences are true:

(1) Doyle created Sherlock Holmes.

(2) Rowling made Harry Potter.

Given that abstract creationism is a kind of realism about fictional characters, it's also consistent with our intuitions that the following are true:

(3) Harry Potter is a fictional character.

(4) Sherlock Holmes is more famous than any real detective.

Abstract creationism, however, has its costs. For instance, consider (5):

(5) Sherlock Holmes exists.

Antirealists and Meinongians about fictional characters claim (5) is false.<sup>1</sup> Abstract creationists are committed to the counterintuitive claim that (5), at least on some reading, is true.<sup>2</sup> This might not be a huge cost. Although abstract creationists accept that Holmes exists, they deny he's a real person walking around London. He (or perhaps *it*) is abstract and a *fictional* person. A fictional person is no more a person than a toy duck is a duck (Kripke 2013, 80). Another issue is that abstract creationism rejects the traditional view that abstracta—paradigmatically numbers—are eternal and causally inert. If characters come into existence, they are not eternal. And if authors *cause* them to exist, characters stand in causal relations.<sup>3</sup> This tension might also not be a huge cost. After all, treaties, contracts, languages, novels, and symphonies are plausibly abstract artifacts. It's not a big leap to accept that fictional characters are abstract artifacts and thus neither eternal nor causally inert (Thomasson 1999, 139–53).

More, of course, can be said about these issues. I won't address them further here. For present purposes what matters is that abstract creationism, despite these issues, is reasonable and worth further consideration. This brings us to Brock's case against abstract creationism.

## II. BROCK'S CENTRAL QUESTION

Brock (2010, 355)<sup>4</sup> poses a question:

**WHEN:** When (i.e. under what circumstances) do authors create fictional characters?

He considers answers to WHEN and argues none of them are correct. Abstract creationism, he concludes, is more mysterious than the phenomena it's trying to explain, namely our intuitions that sentences such as (1)-(4) are true. He thinks unless we can solve the mystery of *when* authors create fictional characters we should not accept that they *do* create them.

Let's look at the answers to WHEN Brock considers. There are three, each inspired by John Searle's statement that "by pretending to refer to people ... the author creates fictional characters" (Searle 1979, 73).<sup>5</sup> The first answer is that "[a] fictional character is created whenever an author uses a fictional name within his or her fiction." (357). Brock notes this answer entails that every time Doyle used 'Holmes' he created a character. That's too many characters to be plausible. The second answer is that "[a] fictional character is created whenever an author uses a fictional name for the first time." (357). Brock notes this answer entails that Superman and Clark Kent are distinct characters, since 'Superman' and 'Clark Kent' are distinct names (358). But Superman and Clark Kent, if they exist, are identical. The point applies to any

character with more than one name: e.g. Jean Louise Finch/Scout, Anakin Skywalker/Darth Vader, and Storm/Ororo Munroe. Moreover, both answers entail there's no such character as Frankenstein's monster, since Mary Shelly never *named* it (359). But, surely, if there are any characters, Frankenstein's monster is one. Fictional characters don't need names.

The third answer Brock considers to WHEN is more reasonable:

**ICP:** "[a] fictional character is created whenever an author intends to create a new fictional character and, as a causal consequence of that intention, pretends to refer to or uniquely identify it." (359).

Brock calls this 'the intended creation by pretense view' and 'ICP' for short.

ICP is inspired by a *prima facie* plausible account of artifacts (359–60). Take tables. One might think a carpenter creates a table iff they intend to create a table by performing certain acts (e.g. carving wood in a certain way) and as a result perform those acts. Likewise, ICP posits that an author creates a fictional character iff they intend to create one and as a result pretend to denote something.

ICP deals with the counterexamples mentioned above. It doesn't entail there's a different character for each of Doyle's uses of 'Holmes'. For, at most only one use of the name was accompanied by an intention to create a character. Similarly, ICP entails that Superman and Clark Kent are identical, provided that 'Clark Kent' was introduced as a name for Superman with no intention to create a new character. Furthermore, ICP allows that Frankenstein's monster and other unnamed characters (e.g. the narrator of *Invisible Man*) are characters, since it doesn't

require that the relevant pretend-denotations involve names. For these reasons, ICP is more attractive than the previously mentioned answers to WHEN.

Brock attacks ICP with three alleged counterexamples. I will present them. I will argue the first two are not genuine counterexamples. The third is genuine—it refutes ICP—but I will show why abstract creationists should not be discouraged. The discussion will defend abstract creationism. Along the way I will discuss how intentions are connected to fictional characters and to artifacts more generally.

### III. THE JEKYLL/HYDE CASE

Brock's first case is as follows:

Imagine that Robert Louis Stevenson's first draft of *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was rather different . . . The plot developments up until the last two chapters were basically the same. But at the moment the body of Hyde is discovered, and Utterson opens Dr. Layton's letter revealing all, the narrative is completely different . . . As events transpire, it is revealed that because Jekyll was planning to cut Hyde out of his life, Hyde got angry, attempted to murder Jekyll, but was overpowered in the process and accidentally killed. By the final chapter, Henry Jekyll's position in society is restored. Everyone except the late Mr. Hyde lives happily ever after. Suppose further that after reading the manuscript, Stevenson's wife Fanny screwed up her face and exclaimed 'how trite.' Stevenson was thus motivated to revise the story, and the result is the novella with which we are all acquainted. (360–61).

Suppose that's what happened. Proponents of ICP are committed to Stevenson having created two distinct characters—one named 'Jekyll' and one named 'Hyde'. For, he introduced these names as causal consequences of distinct intentions to create characters. The story's final draft—"the novella with which we are all acquainted"—seems to be about one character with two names: 'Jekyll' and 'Hyde'. We have a problem: how did we go from two characters to one? Brock thinks there's no good answer. He infers we should reject ICP.

Any abstract creationist—not only proponents of ICP—should try to explain what's going on in the case. Here are some potential explanations:

**ONE SURVIVOR:** Stevenson's first draft is about two distinct characters: Jekyll and Hyde. The final draft is about only one of these characters.

**NO SURVIVOR:** Stevenson's first draft is about two distinct characters: Jekyll and Hyde. The final draft is about a third character that is based on but distinct from the original two.

**TWO BECOME ONE:** Stevenson's first draft is about two distinct characters: Jekyll and Hyde. The final draft is about a character that is identical to the first two.

Suppose that ONE SURVIVOR is correct and that the final draft is about only one of the original two characters. Who is it about? Who is the survivor? It seems arbitrary to pick one. For this reason, I reject ONE SURVIVOR.<sup>6</sup>

TWO BECOME ONE goes against the transitivity of identity, since it entails that a

character is identical to the original characters, which are themselves distinct from each other. Unwilling to reject the transitivity of identity, I reject TWO BECOME ONE.<sup>7</sup>

NO SURVIVOR is more appealing.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, I think it would be true had Stevenson, inspired by his wife's criticism, thought to himself, "I will revise the story so that it is about a new character that is based on the original two." But that's not the most natural interpretation of Brock's case. A more natural interpretation is that Stevenson thought, "I will revise the story so that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person." If this occurred, NO SURVIVOR is less attractive. At least, proponents of ICP should reject NO SURVIVOR, since Stevenson (on my interpretation of Brock's case) doesn't intend to create any characters beyond the original two.

I propose the following explanation:

**TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE:** Stevenson's first draft is about two distinct characters: Jekyll and Hyde. The final draft ascribes to them the property of being identical to each other. They remain distinct characters.

A fiction *ascribes* a property to a character when the character has that property according to the fiction.<sup>9</sup> For instance, *Things Fall Apart* ascribes the properties of being a skilled wrestler and living in Nigeria to Okonkwo. Okonkwo, an abstract object, strictly speaking has neither property. Stevenson's final draft, unbeknownst to its readers, is about two characters but ascribes identity to them.<sup>10</sup>

TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE is consistent with my interpretation of Brock's case. As mentioned above, Stevenson thinks, "I will revise the story so that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person." The text thereby ascribes identity to Jekyll and Hyde. It's just as if Stevenson had

thought, “I will revise the story so that Jekyll is a ventriloquist.” The text would have thereby ascribed *being a ventriloquist* to Jekyll. Authors have vast freedom in what properties are ascribed, and identity ascriptions are no exception. Moreover, ascribing identity to Jekyll and Hyde doesn’t make them identical anymore than ascribing ventriloquism to Jekyll makes him a ventriloquist. Jekyll and Hyde remain distinct.

Brock rejects TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE. He writes provocatively: “[W]e don’t suppose that Stevenson created two characters and ascribed to these distinct individuals the impossible property of being identical to one another.” (361). Brock is too hasty in his rejection. An analogy will strengthen my case. Suppose I write a piece of fan fiction, *The Wizard Who Loved Me*, in which Harry Potter grows up and becomes James Bond. My fiction is about distinct preexistent characters, Potter and Bond. It ascribes identity to them. Likewise, Stevenson’s text ascribes identity to two preexistent characters, Jekyll and Hyde.

The cases have salient differences. It’s clearer to my readers that Bond and Potter are distinct characters than it is to Stevenson’s readers that Jekyll and Hyde are distinct. But this difference is epistemic, not metaphysical. If Martians, ignorant of Earthling literature, were to read *The Wizard Who Loved Me*, they would not realize Bond and Potter are distinct. The Martians would be like Stevenson’s readers who are ignorant of his first draft. Another difference is *The Wizard Who Loved Me* borrows characters from other authors, whereas Stevenson’s text is about his own. This difference poses no threat to TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE. Fans and creators alike can have identity ascribed to distinct characters. I can write a story that ascribes identity to Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple. Nothing, except her sound practical judgment, can stop Agatha Christie from doing the same. Likewise, nothing can stop Stevenson’s text from ascribing identity to two of his characters. Any other differences between *The Wizard*



*Who Loved Me* and the Jekyll/Hyde case seem unimportant. We should take seriously the analogy between the cases.

*The Wizard Who Loved Me* is a fictional (or hypothetical) fiction. There are similar real fictions. Indeed, according to some fan fiction Potter is Bond.<sup>11</sup> Another case is the Star Trek episode “Requiem for Methuselah.” Kirk and Spock (spoiler alert) encounter an immortal man who has lived as Brahms and Da Vinci. Just as Stevenson’s text ascribes identity to two fictional characters, Star Trek ascribes identity to two historical persons (Brahms and Da Vinci).<sup>12</sup>

Some might still intuit that Stevenson’s text, unlike *The Wizard Who Loved Me*, involves *one* main character. Those who have this intuition, among those I have surveyed, tend to find NO SURVIVOR compelling. I prefer TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE, in part because *The Wizard Who Loved Me* makes it seem intuitive to me that Stevenson’s text involves *two* main characters ascribed being one person. Still, NO SURVIVOR is defensible. Whether my view or NO SURVIVOR is correct, abstract creationists can account for the Jekyll/Hyde case.

A change to the case makes it messier. I endorse TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE, since Stevenson thinks, “I will revise the story so that Jekyll and Hyde are the same person.” Suppose he thinks, instead, “I will revise the story so that Jekyll and Hyde are the same *character*.” The change is subtle but evokes a crucial distinction between characters and persons. Only the former, take note, are abstract. Presumably Stevenson doesn’t want Jekyll and Hyde to be ascribed being *characters*. Plausibly he wants them to be ascribed being one *person* but is confused about his phrasing. I’m thus sympathetic to TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE in this context. But it’s complicated. Perhaps he instead wants to make a new character, in which case NO SURVIVOR would be correct.

Things can get even messier. Suppose Stevenson oscillates between thinking about Jekyll

and Hyde as one character and thinking about them as two characters ascribed being one person. Stevenson's jumbled intentions—which are forgivable, given that he's not a metaphysician—might make it indeterminate whether some of his utterances of 'Jekyll' and 'Hyde' refer to a third character or to one of the original two characters.<sup>13</sup> In any event, abstract creationists shouldn't be discouraged. Concrete artifacts can be messy, too. Suppose a carpenter oscillates between thinking the thing they're making is a table and thinking it's a bench. Their jumbled intentions obfuscate what kind of thing they make. We shouldn't on this basis reject creationism about tables and benches. We should instead accept that the creation of artifacts—whether abstract or concrete—is sometimes messy.

In the end I propose TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE. My proposal stems from a plausible view that the number of characters in a fiction depends in some way on authorial intention. I'll further discuss this view in section VI. For now I hope to have shown at least that it's reasonable to accept TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE (even though there are defensible alternatives). The Jekyll/Hyde case fails to refute ICP and abstract creationism more generally.

#### IV. THE HOLMES/WATSON CASE

Brock provides another tricky case (361–62). Suppose Doyle planned from the beginning of his career to write a surprising story in which he would reveal that Watson is an unreliable narrator and the same person as Sherlock Holmes. He died before he could write the story. Brock thinks realists about characters should think Holmes and Watson are still distinct characters. He concludes this is a counterexample to ICP, since Doyle didn't intend to create two characters.

It would be problematic for ICP if authors can create two characters while intending to

create only one. Brock's case, though, doesn't show this to be possible. For, Holmes and Watson are the same character. This claim might seem *ad hoc*. It's not. I once thought Brock's objection was decisive, but on reflection it's intuitive that Holmes and Watson are identical.

*King Lear* will help me make my point. Most people familiar with Shakespeare's play assume that Cordelia and the Fool are distinct characters. It's a very reasonable assumption. There are, however, peculiar facts. The Fool and Cordelia never appear on stage at the same time. After Lear banishes Cordelia, a knight speaking of her says to Lear, "Since my young lady's going into France, sir, the fool hath much pined away" (1.4.734).<sup>14</sup> The Fool inexplicably disappears in the third act. When Cordelia dies Lear says, "And my poor fool is hanged." (5.3.306). Some scholars think these are mere coincidences. Others think the Fool and Cordelia are distinct characters that were played by the same actor. There is a startling minority opinion: Cordelia and the Fool are one character.<sup>15</sup> The basic idea is that Cordelia disguises herself as the Fool to stay close to Lear. Is Cordelia the Fool? We might never know. Intuitively, though, if Shakespeare intended for the Fool and Cordelia to be one character then they are—even if he provides few clues.<sup>16</sup>

I say the same thing about the Holmes/Watson case. If Doyle intended for Watson and Holmes to be one character then they are.<sup>17</sup> Brock hasn't provided a case in which an author makes two characters while intending to make one. An author makes one character and misleadingly leaves the impression there are two. As in the Jekyll/Hyde case, an author's intentions affect how many characters are in a fiction.

The question of how authorial intention affects the number of characters is separate from the oft-discussed question of how authorial intention is related to literary interpretation.<sup>18</sup> For the latter issue I'm sympathetic to moderate or partial intentionalism (e.g. Carroll 2000, Livingston

2005, Stecker 2006). On this view, roughly, a fiction means what its author intended, provided the corresponding interpretation is legitimate—i.e. consistent with literary and linguistic constraints.<sup>19</sup> I have, however, a lax idea of which interpretations are legitimate. On a legitimate (albeit unnatural) interpretation of Doyle’s fiction, Watson and Holmes are the same person. Since Doyle intends for them to be the same person in the fiction—and the corresponding interpretation is legitimate—they are the same person.

I won’t defend this kind of intentionalism. Surprisingly, it’s not needed to support my view that Holmes and Watson are one *character*. Consider hypothetical intentionalism (e.g. Tolhurst 1979, Levinson 2010). On this view, roughly, a fiction’s meaning is determined by the intentions one could most reasonably attribute to its author—even if the author’s intentions are different. Hypothetical intentionalists think in Doyle’s fiction (despite his intentions) Watson and Holmes are two persons. They can still think Watson and Holmes are one *character*. On this line the fiction ascribes to Watson the property of being two persons. One is ascribed being two. This happens in other cases. Suppose someone writes a tiny fan fiction about *Game of Thrones*:

*Dragon Training*: Two distinct persons, Daenerys Stormborn and Daenerys Targaryen, trained a dragon.

Suppose *Dragon Training*’s author, like those unaware of Hesperus being Phosphorus, is unaware that Daenerys Stormborn is the same character as Daenerys Targaryen. (The “fan” in question is a poseur.) One is thereby ascribed being two. Hypothetical intentionalists could take the Holmes/Watson case to be analogous. So, one needn’t accept my views about literary interpretation to accept that Holmes and Watson are one character.

Indeed, my belief that Holmes and Watson are one character relies on no account of literary interpretation. It stems instead from my view that the number of characters in a fiction depends in some way on authorial intentions (whether or not authorial intentions determine the proper interpretation of the work). As mentioned above, I'll discuss this view in section VI. For now I hope to have shown at least that it's reasonable to believe Holmes and Watson are one character. The Holmes/Watson case fails to refute ICP and abstract creationism more generally.

## V. THE NOMINALIST-ROWLING CASE

Brock's third example (362) shows that authors can unintentionally create characters. Suppose Rowling is a nominalist and thus denies any abstracta exist. She believes writing her stories will not produce any fictional characters. She intends not to create any. Brock thinks abstract creationists should still think Rowling creates Harry Potter and many other characters. He concludes this is a counterexample to ICP.

This example refutes ICP. *Pace* Brock, this shouldn't discourage abstract creationists. To see why, recall the view of tables that inspires ICP: a carpenter creates a table iff they intend to create a table by performing certain acts (e.g., carving wood in a certain way) and as a result perform those acts. This view is susceptible to cases like the Rowling case. Suppose Peter van Inwagen has stayed faithful to his views about composition (van Inwagen 1990). He thinks there are no tables. There are merely simples arranged table-wise. His musings have sparked an interest in carpentry. Every weekend he carves wood in his garage. To any non-philosophical observer it would appear he makes tables. But he's not intending to make tables. He's trying to arrange simples table-wise. Intuitively, van Inwagen still creates tables. Just as a nominalist

storyteller may create fictional characters, a nihilist carpenter may create tables.<sup>20 21</sup>

Surprisingly, then, one can make an artifact without intending to make anything of its kind—indeed, without intending to make anything.<sup>22</sup> This renders it mysterious when characters are created. But the same is true of tables and other concrete artifacts—e.g. teapots and watches. Recall that Brock’s argument relies on the claim that abstract creationism is more mysterious than the phenomena it’s trying to explain, namely our intuitions about certain sentences (e.g. ‘Rowling made Harry Potter’ and ‘Harry Potter is a fictional character’). His argument shouldn’t persuade us to reject abstract creationism if the mystery surrounding fictional characters applies also to tables. Brock is trying to show that fictional characters are uniquely mysterious, or at least that they are more mysterious than mundane concrete artifacts. He hasn’t succeeded.

The Rowling case, then, doesn’t give abstract creationists a reason to reject their view so much as it offers a research project: to discern the connection between intentions and artifacts. I won’t endorse a theory here, but it’s worth noting intentions are crucial in the above cases. It’s not as if van Inwagen carves wood arbitrarily. He intends to arrange simples table-wise. Similarly, Rowling isn’t arbitrarily pressing buttons on her computer’s keyboard. It’s hard, though, to discern the exact connection between their intentions and their artifacts.

One proposal is that Van Inwagen makes tables, because he intends to bring about results that others would take to involve tables. Likewise, Rowling intends to bring about results that others would take to involve fictional characters.<sup>23</sup> Another proposal is that van Inwagen makes tables, because he intends, roughly, for people to do the sorts of things that commonly count as using tables—e.g. placing lamps on them, eating meals near them, etc. Likewise, Rowling intends, roughly, for people to do the sorts of things that commonly count as “using” fictional characters—e.g. telling stories about them, engaging in certain pretenses, etc. Neither van

Inwagen nor Rowling would describe their intentions in these exact words, since they don't believe in tables and characters, respectively. (Van Inwagen also doesn't believe in lamps.) But something along these lines might be correct.<sup>24</sup>

I'm unsure exactly how van Inwagen's and Rowling's intentions are connected to their artifacts. Some proposal I haven't considered might be best. I leave this issue for further research. But this much is clear. Van Inwagen's and Rowling's intentions are crucial. If they were behaving arbitrarily they wouldn't produce artifacts. Moreover, Brock has raised an issue about artifacts generally. Abstract creationists should pay attention but not be discouraged.

## VI: INTENTIONS AND PREEXISTENT CHARACTERS

In discussing the Jekyll/Hyde and Holmes/Watson cases I claimed the number of characters in a fiction depends in some way on authorial intentions. I conceded the nominalist-Rowling case shows authors can accidentally create characters. There's some tension between these claims. I will resolve the tension by saying more about *how* the number of characters depends on intentions.

First, we should reject an extreme view: that fictions always contain as many characters as their authors intend. The Rowling case refutes this. So do other cases. Imagine a Martian writes a sequel to *The Wizard Who Loved Me*. The Martian intends to include one protagonist but includes two: Bond and Potter.<sup>25</sup> *Dragon Training*'s author thinks it contains two characters, but it involves one: Daenerys. So we need a more moderate view about characters and intentions.

Amie Thomasson (1999, 67-69) offers guidance. She discusses characters appearing in multiple works—e.g. Miss Marple in multiple Agatha Christie novels. She proposes a necessary

condition for character x in fiction K to be identical to character y in a later fiction L: “The author of L must be competently acquainted with x of K and intend to import x into L as y,” where this involves “the kind of acquaintance that would enable the author to be a competent user of the name of x (supposing x were named), as it is used in K.” (Thomasson 1999, 67). She thinks this condition provides a “very good benchmark” for discerning when characters in different fictions are identical. The basic idea is that, typically, when an author intends to write about a character they’re familiar with from another fiction, they succeed. This is plausible.

We can extend this idea to cover cases involving solitary works as well as those involving multiple works. I propose the following rule of thumb.

**NOTHING NEW:** Generally, when a fiction’s author intends for a property to be ascribed to a particular preexistent character—whether that character is originally from that work or another—the author represents that character without creating a new one.

NOTHING NEW is plausible. It also supports my conclusions about the Jekyll/Hyde and Holmes/Watson cases. Stevenson intends for it to be true in his fiction that Jekyll is Hyde. He intends for identity to be ascribed to these preexistent characters. In accordance with NOTHING NEW, he represents these characters and makes no new ones. Doyle intends for his fiction to ascribe to Watson the properties of being an unreliable narrator and being a detective named ‘Holmes’. In accordance with NOTHING NEW, he makes no further character. The rule also handles *Dragon Training*. Its author intends for the property *having trained a dragon* to be ascribed to Daenerys, a preexistent character they don’t know is under two guises. In accordance with NOTHING NEW, the author makes no new character. The rule is silent on (and thus



consistent with) the Rowling case, since she's not intending to represent preexistent characters.

NOTHING NEW does not say authors succeed when they intend for a property to be ascribed to a character. They may fail. Suppose an author, intending for wastefulness to be ascribed to a character, mistakenly uses 'prodigious' instead of 'prodigal.' Their intention is unsuccessful. Crucially, though, the author still represents the character they intend to represent.

It's worth emphasizing NOTHING NEW is just a rule of thumb. Sometimes an author makes a character when intending for a property to be ascribed to a preexistent one. If Jane Austen writes that Emma has a doctor, intending for the property *has a doctor* to be ascribed, she might, depending on the context, create a character: Emma's doctor. Still, NOTHING NEW is helpful. As with any rule of thumb, we should apply it in certain cases and also discern when it clearly doesn't apply.

We now have a better idea of one way authorial intentions affect how many characters are in a fiction. An intention to represent *preexistent* characters typically doesn't lead to new ones. This idea might seem trivial, but it underlies surprising conclusions: that the Jekyll/Hyde case involves two characters and that the Holmes/Watson case involves one.

## VII. CONCLUSION

Brock's attack on abstract creationism does not succeed. His Jekyll/Hyde and Holmes/Watson cases fail to refute ICP and abstract creationism more generally. NOTHING NEW supports my diagnoses of these cases. It describes one way the number of fictional characters depends on authorial intentions. The Rowling case, though a counterexample to ICP, should not discourage abstract creationists. It should guide us in discerning the connection between intentions and

artifacts, both abstract and concrete.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Antirealists (e.g. Russell (1905)) deny there are fictional characters. Meinongians (e.g. Meinong (1904) and Parsons (1980)) claim there are fictional characters but deny they exist.

<sup>2</sup> See Braun (2005), Kripke (2013), Salmon (1998), and Thomasson (2003) for discussion of related semantic issues. See Yagisawa (2001, 169–70) for an anti-creationist perspective.

<sup>3</sup> Deutsch (1991) makes this point about causation to argue against abstract creationism.

<sup>4</sup> Unless specified otherwise all further citations are from Brock (2010).

<sup>5</sup> An anonymous referee points out that Searle is likely not an abstract creationist. For our purposes we can take Searle’s statement to be more metaphysically serious than he might have intended.

<sup>6</sup> Brock rejects ONE SURVIVOR or at least something similar when he writes, “[W]e don’t suppose that Stevenson created two characters and then decided to destroy one.” (361). ONE SURVIVOR is agnostic about whether the excluded character is destroyed or merely set aside.

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<sup>7</sup> Brock likely rejects TWO BECOME ONE when he writes: “We don’t suppose that Stevenson created two characters and then in a further creative act fused the two into one.” (361). It’s somewhat unclear what Brock has in mind, because it’s unclear what is meant by ‘fused’. As an anonymous referee points out, it helps to consider cases involving concreta, such as when two galaxies “become one”. Given the transitivity of identity, I deny a third galaxy is identical to the first two. More plausible is that a third galaxy—distinct from the first two—is constituted by stars that constituted the first two. Perhaps, something similar happens in the Jekyll/Hyde case. This would fall under NO SURVIVOR instead of TWO BECOME ONE. On a four-dimensionalist account, the two galaxies share temporal parts when they “become one”. It’s unclear how fictional characters, given their abstractness, could be constituted by anything or share temporal parts with other characters, but these ideas are worth considering.

<sup>8</sup> Manning (2012, 9) and Sacrkis (2013, 4) express sympathy for NO SURVIVOR.

<sup>9</sup> The term ‘ascription’ is from van Inwagen (1977). An anonymous referee points out that my characterization of the ascription relation is more in line with what Salmon (1998, n37, n42) says about it.

<sup>10</sup> TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE is similar to Schneider and von Solodkoff’s (2009) explanation of a case Everett (2005) offers in which, according to some fiction, there are two indeterminately identical people. Schneider and von Solodkoff claim the fiction ascribes indeterminate identity to two distinct characters. I’m less confident, though, about their position than I am about TWO ASCRIBED BEING ONE. See Caplan and Muller (2014) and its forthcoming sequel for criticism of Schneider and von Solodkoff’s position.

<sup>11</sup> Fanfiction.net includes a short piece ‘James Potter007’ by someone who goes by the name ‘LightningFire1997’. Potter and Bond are ascribed being one person, although the piece is somewhat difficult to interpret.

<https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8738652/1/James-Potter007>, accessed April 7, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> I owe this example to Kimberly Johnston.

<sup>13</sup> This idea is inspired by Braun (2005, 610-612). He claims sometimes names in a fiction refer to a character, and sometimes they refer to nothing. It depends in part on the author’s intentions and whether the author has singular thoughts about a character. Braun thinks sometimes when an author has inconsistent intentions it is indeterminate whether reference occurs. He assumes there exists a character created by the author; his inquiry is about what is required for reference to it. One might think some versions of the Jekyll/Hyde case involve *ontic* indeterminacy—an indeterminacy about how many fictional characters *exist* rather than merely a semantic indeterminacy about which of them are referred to. I don’t think it’s far-fetched to accept *ontic* indeterminacy. Indeed, there is reason to think any plausible account of abstract artifacts (e.g. fictional characters, novels, words, and languages) will be committed to *ontic* indeterminacy. This is beyond the scope of this paper. Korman (2014) provides relevant discussion.

<sup>14</sup> *King Lear* citations are from *The Riverside Shakespeare, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition*.

<sup>15</sup> Stringer (1897) takes this position. See Stroup (1961) for a defense of the two-character/one-actor view and for discussion of all sides of the controversy.

<sup>16</sup> I owe this example to Deborah Friedell.

<sup>17</sup> I don’t think that there are always as many characters in a fiction as its author intends. I discuss and reject that idea in section VI. I think merely that Shakespeare and Doyle in these cases have control over whether they create one or two characters.

<sup>18</sup> Thomasson (1999, 160-161 n.15) expresses sympathy for this position.

<sup>19</sup> I set aside the issue of multiple authors. See Livingston (2005) for discussion.

<sup>20</sup> I’m using poetic license, as van Inwagen’s view is close to but not quite nihilism. He thinks, other than organisms, there are no composite objects.

<sup>21</sup> Simon Evnine, in an unpublished manuscript on his Neo-Aristotelian theory of events and artifacts, independently reaches this conclusion about Brock’s objection.

<sup>22</sup> Thomasson (2007, 53) endorses a contrary view: “[I]t is not just a causal fact but a conceptual truth that artifacts must be the products of human intentions, indeed of intentions to produce something of that very kind.” Baker (2004, 99) does, too: “Artifacts are objects intentionally made to serve a given purpose.” Michelangelo’s *David* suggests another counterexample. If legend is accurate, Michelangelo once said, “*David* was always there in the marble. I just took away everything that was not *David*.” Even if he intended to merely *reveal* the sculpture, intuitively he still *created* it. I owe this example to Sam Cumming.

<sup>23</sup> An anonymous referee points out the Holmes/Watson case raises a complication. Doyle intends to produce a result that others will take to involve two characters, even though there is (on my view) only one. It might help to invoke NOTHING NEW, a rule of thumb I endorse in the following section. Perhaps that rule takes precedence over what Doyle intends for others to take there to be, even if normally such an intention would carry weight.

<sup>24</sup> I’m grateful here to Katrina Elliott and Simon Evnine for discussion.

<sup>25</sup> I owe this example to an anonymous referee.

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<sup>26</sup> I would like to thank Sam Cumming, Katrina Elliott, Simon Evnine, Deborah Friedell, Kimberly Johnston, and two anonymous referees for helpful comments and discussion.