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Creature Features: Character Production and Failed Explanations in Fiction, Folklore, and Theorizing

Chris Tillman[1] and Joshua Spencer[2]

[1]Department of Philosophy, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, and [2]Department of Philosophy, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI, USA
Corresponding author: Chris Tillman; Email: Chris.Tillman@umanitoba.ca

Abstract
Fictional realism is the view that creatures of fiction exist. Mythical realism is the view that creatures of myth and mistaken theories exist. Call the combined view "Ecumenical Realism." We critically evaluate three arguments for Ecumenical Realism and argue they are unsound because fictional storytelling differs from mistaken theorizing in important ways. We think these considerations support a more conservative view, "Sectarian Realism," which results from subtracting "creatures of mistaken theorizing" from Ecumenical Realism. We close by considering an important challenge to Sectarian Realism involving immigrants in fiction.

1. Introduction

Fictional realists hold that creatures of fiction, such as Gene Roddenberry's fictional planet, Vulcan, exist.[1] Mythical realists hold that creatures of myth, such as the Roman god, Vulcan, exist. And if we squint hard enough at "myth" until it includes things like failed scientific theory, then mythical realists *also* hold that creatures of failed scientific theory exist.[2] (For an example, look no further

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[1]On fictional realism, see van Inwagen (1977 (Reprinted in (2001)), 1983, 1985, 2000, 2003), Searle (1979), Parsons (1980, 2011), Routley (1980), Wolterstorff (1980), Howell (1983, 1996), Zalta (1983), Currie (1988), Levinson (1993), Lamarque and Olsen (1994), Schiffer (1996), Salmón (1998 (Reprinted in (2005b)), 2002, 2015, 2023), Thomasson (1996, 1999, 2003), Caplan (2002, 2004), Predelli (2002), Soames (2002), Goodman (2003, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014), Braun (2005, 2015, 2021), Priest (2005), Schneider and von Solodkoff (2009), Voltolini (2003, 2006, 2010, 2015), Voltolini (Forthcoming), Berto (2011), Kripke (2011, 2013), Caplan and Muller (2015), Evnine (2016), Freidell (2016), Zvolenszky (2016), Bueno and Zalta (2017), Haraldsen (2017), Terrone (2017), Abell (2020), Savage (2020), Stokke (2020, 2023), Glavaničová (2021), and Lee (2022, Forthcoming), among others. See also Lihoreau (2011) and Brock and Everett (2015).
[2]On mythical realism (in this sense), see Salmón (1998 (Reprinted in (2005b)), 2002, 2015, 2023), Braun (2005, 2015, 2021), Caplan (2002, 2004), Goodman (2003, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014), Thomasson (1996, 1999, 2003, Voltolini (Forthcoming), and Zvolenszky (2016).

Kripke is sometimes classified as a mythical realist, but his view is rather, well, *subtle*. Commenting in the preface to his 2013, he says,

> Probably the most substantial contribution of the lectures was the ontology of fictional and mythical characters, conceived of as abstract objects whose existence depends on the existence or non-existence of various fictional or mythological works. I took natural language as my guide, which just quantifies over these things. Thus, I did not intend to apply the notion to 'Vulcan', 'phlogiston', or other vacuous theoretical names of a more recent vintage, which are 'mythological' objects only in a highly extended and perhaps even metaphorical sense of 'mythological'. However, I am

than Le Verrier's proposed intra-Mercurial planet: Vulcan.) Call the combination of fictional realism and mythical realism "Ecumenical Realism."

We think that the most plausible versions of fictional and mythical realism are ones according to which a Vulcan, by any name, is neither a god nor a planet. Rather, any Vulcans that exist are ultimately the products of the activities of human beings, and human beings' activities cannot literally result in the production of gods or planets, in the relevant sense.[3,4] We'll assume as much in what follows, at any rate. But we differ from many fictional realists in thinking that the cases for the Vulcans are not on a par. In our view, while Vulcan exists, Vulcan and Vulcan do not.

As the Vulcan examples suggest, fictions, myths, and scientific theories borrow from each other. And many prominent fictional realists—the Ecumenical Realists—think that the similarities go even deeper. Some of the main arguments for Ecumenical Realism exploit the apparently close relationships between how fictions and myths are produced. Many Ecumenical Realists accept that, due to their similarities, insofar as we are committed to creatures of fiction, we are also committed to creatures of myth and scientific theorizing.[5] So, if they are right, fictional realists should also be Ecumenical Realists. After a bit more stage-setting, we address arguments for Ecumenical Realism.

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not entirely sure of the difference in principle between such erroneously postulated scientific entities and the figures of myth (which were, after all, genuinely, though wrongly, believed to be real). So perhaps I should have extended my treatment to them as well, as some have assumed I did. But the use of natural language as a guide perhaps reveals an essential difference." (Kripke, 2013, p. x; cf. Salmón, 2002, p. 104, fn. 22)

As will hopefully become clear, we agree with Zvolenszky (2016, p. 315, fn. 8) that Kripke's notion of myth in his 2013 is basically that of a kind of fiction. (For further discussion of subtleties of Kripke's views on the topic and surrounding matters, see, e.g., Caplan, 2016; Liebesman, 2014.) Most others who have defended fictional realism do not also discuss mythical realism in either this "Kripkean" sense or an "Ecumenical" sense (above), on which creatures of folklore, like the supposed Roman god, are considered together with creatures of theory, like the alleged intra-Mercurial planet, as purported creatures of myth. A notable exception is Goodman (2003, 2004, 2005, 2010, 2014), who, as far as we know, is alone in joining us in embracing fictional realism while rejecting (ecumenical) mythical realism, though we differ on some important matters.

[3]We endorse *creationism about creatures of fiction*, in Caplan's (2004, p. 331) terminology: "when authors write works of fiction, they create fictional characters and other objects that we can call *creatures of fiction*." (Caplan, 2004, italics in original. Caplan (2004) also notes that "creature of fiction" is due to van Inwagen (1977 (Reprinted in (2001))). So while some authors are a bit difficult to pigeonhole, here we take ourselves to part ways with, for instance, Meinongians and other Noneists about creatures of fiction (see Berto, 2011; Priest 2005; Parsons, 1980, 2011; Routley, 1980. Cf. Priest (2011), Voltolini (2015), and Deutsch (1991), for exotic versions of "creationism" on which fictional characters can be created without being brought into existence), along with Possibilist positions on which Holmes is a merely possible person (cf. Goodman, 2010; Haraldsen, 2017; Kaplan, 1973; Lewis, 1978a; see also Kripke, 1963, who endorses the view but then disavows it in his Kripke, 1980; Plantinga (1974, p. 153) expresses sympathy for the view but does not endorse it), and Platonistic positions on which Holmes eternally exists or is otherwise an uncreated "abstract object" (see Bueno and Zalta, 2017; Terrone, 2017; Zalta, 1983), or a set of some sort. (For discussion, see, e.g., Evnine (2016, pp. 140-141).) While Meinongians and other Noneists (basically) maintain Holmes does not exist and smokes, we think he (*it*, really) exists and does not smoke. (Round up all the smokers—you do not find Holmes!) And we find Possibilism metaphysically and semantically unpalatable in roughly equal measure (see Caplan, 2016; Liebesman, 2014). Finally, Platonists typically hold that the existence of Holmes predates the existence of Doyle, which we also deny. And in denying fictional characters are sets of some sort, as opposed to real, historical individuals (broadly in the sense of Rohrbaugh, 2003), we are also parting ways with fictional realists like Wolterstorff (1980), Currie (1988), Lamarque and Olsen (1994), Evnine (2016), Stokke (2020), and Glavaničová (2021), many of whom are inspired by Frege (1892). Finally, insofar as we do not think "Holmes smokes" is literally true, we also part ways with Savage (2020). However, despite being creationists about creatures of fiction, we do not think it is essential to all creatures of fiction that they are intentionally created. We elaborate on this below. Some of what we say could be retrofitted for use by other fictional realists. We do not elaborate on *that* below.

[4]Sometimes philosophers (and others, like cultural anthropology-types) are happy to say things along the lines of "we create the gods," etc. (According to our informants, in addition to the pre-Socratic Xenophanes, this sort of view has also been variously attributed to the likes of Nietzsche and Freud.) Whatever truth there is to this (and we are sympathetic to thinking there is *some*), what we mean here is that, for example, it is false that it is within the capacities of beings like us to bring about individuals that, among other things, predate our own existence, to say nothing of something that is omnipotent or has some other astounding, godly feature (cf. Salmón, 2005a, p. ix).

[5]Some go further. Caplan (2016) and Braun (2005, 2015, 2021). also discuss creatures of *imagination*. And Kripke (1980) discusses creatures of *hallucination*. We're (mostly) setting those aside here.

Then, we consider some special problems that confront those who would wish to resist Ecumenical Realism, as we would. Along the way, we'll sketch some packages of metaphysical views that we think can help point the way forward for fictional realists.

2. A Bit More Stage-Setting

Our thesis, if you like, is that, while Vulcan exists, Vulcan and Vulcan do not.[6] But it will probably make things a bit less confusing if we switch to using non-homonymous running examples. So, for the remainder, we'll follow much of the literature in using Arthur Conan Doyle's fictional detective, Sherlock Holmes, as our main example of a creature of fiction, while retaining "Le Verrier's Vulcan" as our main example of a purported creature of failed scientific theorizing. And, for reasons that will become apparent, we will use the name "Thor," on its "mythical" usage, where it purports to refer to a god of thunder, as our main example of a creature of myth. But in a more colloquial, and "non-squinty" sense, if you will.[7]

We turn next to the arguments for Ecumenical Realism.[8] The first, having mainly to do with the relationship between belief and make-belief, is from Nathan Salmón (by way of Ben Caplan). The second, from David Braun (again by way of Caplan), appeals to the relationship between elements of fictional storytelling and elements of mistaken theorizing. The third is inspired by a view of the metaphysics of stories presented in Sam Cowling and Ley Cray's *Philosophy of Comics: An Introduction* (Cowling & Cray, 2022), as well as the feud between Stan Lee and Steve Ditko over who created Spider-Man.[9] We maintain that these arguments for Ecumenical Realism do not make for a strong case, individually or collectively. Finally, we consider what we see as an important threat to our preferred view.

3. Arguing for Ecumenical Realism: Nathan Salmón's and Ben Caplan's Attitudes

In "Mythical Objects," Salmón argues for Ecumenical Realism:[10]

> Some philosophers who accept the reality of fictional characters nevertheless reject mythical objects. The usual motivation is the feeling that whereas Sherlock Holmes is a real object, a character created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the Vulcan theory was wrong precisely because Vulcan simply does not exist. This ignores the nearly perfect similarity between fiction and myth. Whatever good reason there is for acknowledging the real existence of Holmes extends to Vulcan. … Myths and fictions are both made up. The principal difference between mythical and fictional objects is that the myth is believed while the fiction is only make-believe. This difference does nothing to obliterate the reality of either fictional or mythical objects. (Salmón, 2002, p. 104, fn. 22)

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[6]More carefully: We endorse fictional realism while rejecting mythical realism. We'll be in a position to further refine the thesis after introducing some additional important distinctions and qualifications in due course.

[7]As we hope to make clear below, we do not consider such uses of "Thor" as *exemplars* of mythical uses of names. We're not sure whether we are using "usage" in the manner of Salmón's "types of use" *à la* (Braun, 2005, p. 628, fn. 40). What we have in mind are the uses that occurred in the context of Germanic pagan myth-making, and their (appropriate) "descendants."

[8]We will also, in another footnote, briefly consider a vaguely Quinean (1948) argument for Ecumenical Realism, adapted from van Inwagen (1977 (Reprinted in (2001))) and Caplan (2004). Despite its importance, we will not have a lot to say about it in this paper. We think here is where we are supposed to appeal to space constraints.

[9]None of Cowling, Cray, Lee, or Ditko actually present or, to our knowledge, endorse the argument we will consider that is inspired by them.

[10]Salmón indicates his enduring approval of this sort of argument and the view it means to support in Salmón (2015, pp. 118–23) and in Salmón (2023, p. 5).

Here, Salmón alleges a close parallel between fiction and myth and suggests that the onus is on the fictional realist who does not also countenance creatures of myth, like us, to point to a salient difference. Caplan (2004, pp. 333–334) also reads Salmón this way and presents Salmón's argument as follows:

(P1) Authors create creatures of fiction.
(P2) If authors create creatures of fiction, then myth-makers create creatures of myth.
(C1) So, myth-makers create creatures of myth.

In support of the crucial premise (P2), Caplan says:

The difference between authors and myth-makers is one of propositional attitude: authors *make-believe* their works of fiction, whereas myth-makers do not make-believe their myths; rather, they genuinely *believe* their myths. If (P2) is false, then make-believing must be *ontologically special* in a way that believing is not: it must be the case that there is something ontologically special about make-believing in virtue of which, when authors make-believe their works of fiction, they create. …; whereas it must not be the case that there is anything ontologically special about believing in virtue of which, when myth-makers believe their myths, they create. … It's hard to see how make-believing could be ontologically special in this way if believing is not. (*Ibid.*, italics in original)

Caplan argues that, if (P2) is false, then there is an ontologically significant difference between attitudes of belief and make-belief. But there is not. So, if authors create creatures of fiction, then myth-makers create creatures of myth. But that is just (P2).

We deny (P2), and we deny that there is no ontologically significant difference between belief and make-belief in these sorts of cases. Consider again Doyle and Le Verrier. We think it is plausible to suppose that Doyle's acts of make-belief were *creative* in a way that Le Verrier's were not. That is, Doyle's acts of make-belief involve *creative intentions,* which play an important role in bringing works of fictions (and their creatures) about.[11] In central cases of myth-making, and *particularly* the cases of failed scientific theorizing, the right kinds of creative intentions on the part of theorizers who believe their theories seem to be *completely lacking.*[12] This difference, we maintain, is ontologically significant.

We think there are further related, ontologically significant differences between attitudes of belief and make-belief. First, consider belief. Doxastic voluntarism, the view that we can form beliefs "at will," is widely regarded as false.[13] But contrast that with "*quasi-*doxastic voluntarism," as we might call it, which is, roughly, the view that we can engage in acts of make-belief at will. Quasi-doxastic voluntarism is plausibly true—we are free to pretend as we like. Acts of make-belief are under our control in a way that beliefs are not.

Second, make-belief is *active*, in the sense that engaging in make-belief often involves imaginative transformation of one's environment. We can select whatever we like to serve as a "prop in a game of make-believe," and then proceed to imagine whatever we wish about it.[14] When authors engage in acts of make-belief, they become literal *content creators.* In contrast, belief often involves comparatively *passive* comprehending, considering, and accepting of pieces of "pre-packaged" information.

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[11]Deployment of creative intentions in the right way is a plausible necessary condition on the creation of artifacts in general (see, e.g., Baker, 2004, 2007; Bloom, 1996; Cray, 2017; Evnine, 2016; Freidell, 2016, 2017a, 2017b; Hilpinen, 1992, 1993, 2011; Irmak, 2020, 2021; Thomasson, 2007a, 2007b, 2009). The view has ancient roots (Aristotle (1984) espouses it in *Metaphysics* 1033a ff, *Nichomachean Ethics* 1140a ff., and *Physics* 192b ff.; cf. Brock, 2010, 2017; Goodman, 2017, 2020; Zvolenszky, 2016). While it is *plausible* that creative intentions are necessary, we do not think, ultimately, that it is *true.* We elaborate below.

[12]As Goodman (2014) notes, mistaken theorizers not only lack the relevant creative intentions; rather, they actively intend *not* to be creative.

[13]The *locus classicus* of the contemporary debate is Williams (1970).

[14]The "prop in a game of make-believe" locution is due to Walton (1990).

We think that these differences underwrite the capacity for authors to use acts of make-belief to initiate novel *practices* of imaginatively transforming environments and inviting others to make-believe in a similar manner, thereby creating new "targets" for attitudes. Typical fictional stories are tools for engaging in just this sort of practice, which is (typically) established by the story's author, as is plausibly the case in Doyle's stories involving Holmes.

In contrast, scientific theorizing, like Le Verrier's, seems to involve belief as a result of trying to follow the evidence gathered (from extra-fictional reality) in order to discern proper explanations for (extra-fictional) natural phenomena. No creative transformations of the relevant sort are established. And no practice of engaging in a "game of belief" is initiated by Le Verrier's hypothesizing the cause of perturbations in the orbit of Mercury.

In short, whereas make-belief is active and creative and can initiate a distinct sort of imaginative practice, belief is passive and uncreative, and does not initiate any relevant practices in an analogous way. In this sense, Doyle's attitude of make-belief is itself *powerful* in a way that Le Verrier's attitude of belief is not. This difference is ontologically significant.

Granted, there is an *attenuated* sense in which both fiction-making and myth-making are creative in the same way; as Salmón points out, both are "made up." That is, both Le Verrier and Doyle create *texts* of some sort. However, there is an important difference in the creative acts of Doyle and Le Verrier: in addition and related to those differences already mentioned, Doyle's acts of text-creation were plausibly backed by (something like) "character-directed" creative intentions—like those involved in producing Holmes—while Le Verrier's acts of text-creation had a different aim entirely: Le Verrier sought a factual explanation of perturbations in the orbit of Mercury. Instead of intending to create the text of a fictional story, largely unfettered by the vicissitudes of extra-fictional reality, Le Verrier intended to create a text that contained an accurate explanation of a real-world phenomenon.[15]

In our view, entirely different processes which are only, at best, *superficially* similar are at play in Doyle's and Le Verrier's cases. Given Doyle's aims, and the world's cooperation, Doyle succeeded, and Holmes exists. That is, Doyle's aim was to create a fiction, and he succeeded in doing this, because all that is required for his success is that he manages to engage his imagination in the right way. In so doing, he thereby created Holmes. But given Le Verrier's aims and the world's *lack* of cooperation, Le Verrier failed; Vulcan does not exist.[16] That is, Le Verrier's aim was explanatory, and the world did not cooperate by providing a hitherto undiscovered planet satisfying his theory. While the similarity is superficial—both Doyle and Le Verrier produce texts seemingly involving "figures" resembling characters—the differences in the processes run deep.

We conclude, then, that there is a stark ontological difference between the following:

- activities that lead to the creation of fiction, and the attendant invitations to make-believe, and
- activities that lead to the construction of *mistaken theories*, and the attendant invitations to believe.

And these differences have their source in differences between the attitudes themselves. On the basis of this stark ontological difference, we believe (P2) is false, and Salmón's argument for Ecumenical Realism is unsound.

4. An Objection and an Important Distinction: Fictional Storytelling Versus Mistaken Theories

We think the right contrast to draw in order to bring out our point above is between cases like Doyle's, on the one hand, and Le Verrier's, on the other. But it might seem that we have cherry-

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[15]Goodman (2014, p. 36) makes just this point about Doyle's and Le Verrier's differing intentions.

[16]We owe this observation to Goodman (2014, p. 39), who makes heavy use it.

picked our examples to suit our purposes. Things might look very different if we compared a case of fiction to a more "standard" myth, as opposed to a failed scientific theory, for example. In a way, that is right. But we do not think that is a knock against us. We think that is best seen as a knock against what passes for "myth" in the literature.

Contrary to Salmón (1998 (Reprinted in (2005b)), 2002, 2015, 2023) (and others who follow him in this—"Salmónians"), we think it is deleterious to assimilate failed scientific theories with all of the more colloquial cases of myths. Whereas Salmónians see the relevant "fault line" as dividing fiction on the one hand, and myths *of all sorts*, plus failed scientific theories, on the other, we think it is more natural to draw the division elsewhere. We think the Salmónian view is in some ways too crude, insofar as it has a distorting effect on the present debates. For one, myths themselves are but one strain of folklore that also includes legends and fables.[17] For another, colloquially at least, myths do not include scientific theories. While Salmónians are free to use "myth" however they like, we think it would be more natural to categorize these works according to whether they have more purely fictional ends, or more (perhaps quasi-) scientific explanatory aspirations, at least insofar as we can.[18]

First, the (relatively) easy cases: Doyle's fiction is a pretty paradigmatic case of fiction. Mistaken scientific theories, including Le Verrier's, on the other hand, paradigmatically possess scientific explanatory aims. These are just our previous, "cherry-picked" cases. But where does that leave folklore in general and more "colloquial" myths?

Folklore bears some hallmarks of fictions, while also bearing some salient features of mistaken scientific theories in some cases. For example, the use of "Thor" first appeared in the context of a myth with some overtly quasi-scientific explanatory aims. But many cases, including the case of the "Thor" myth, are rather complicated and messy. It is plausible that the ancient pagan originators of the "Thor" myth sought both to entertain—much like modern fictions—and to *explain*—much like modern scientific theorizing. Many myths, legends, and fables plausibly have other aims as well— including moral instruction, strengthening social bonds, imparting life lessons, fomenting a sense of group identity, and so on. We can see the aims of fictions like Doyle's and scientific theories like Le Verrier's as more focused and specific, in contrast to the "cultural Swiss army knives" found in folklore. We consider the separation of storytelling into explanatory projects, on the one hand, and the production of fanciful stories, on the other hand, a major milestone in intellectual history. But to the extent that the aims of fiction and the aims of science were jumbled together in some folklore, including the "Thor" myth, it is somewhat difficult to say whether the "Thor" myth enjoys a status more like Doyle's fiction, or more like Le Verrier's failed scientific theory. We surmise, though, that the intention to *explain* played a central role in the creation of the "Thor" myth. Central enough, at any rate, to (more or less) safely say the Thor of pagan mythology does not exist, as thunder is not properly explained by invoking a god.[19]

In contrast, there are many myths that lack an overtly quasi-scientific explanatory aim.[20] For example, the myth of Sisyphus's main aim is apparently moral instruction, with no overt quasi-

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[17]Cf. Lycan (2015, pp. 38–39). One reason why this is important is that it is plausible to suppose different genres of folklore typically involve different interplays of belief and make-belief between creators and consumers of folklore and the relevant texts.

[18]We think the endeavor of categorizing bits of folklore as fiction or quasi-science is not only rather procrustean but perhaps also objectionably anachronistic; insofar as the modern practices of fiction-making and scientific theorizing arose out of refinements to myth-making or folkloric traditions, there is something perhaps problematically ahistorical about the endeavor. If it helps, though, we are not here *mainly* thinking of how to categorize bits of folklore as fictions or quasi-science; rather, we are trying to appeal to what we take to be a more explanatorily basic distinction between works which more or less overtly attempt to explain natural phenomena, and those that do not. Regardless, the actual cases can be quite messy, indeterminate, and vague. In a related context, Braun (2005, pp. 612–614) cautions that somewhat similar issues plausibly involve a lot more indeterminacy than many philosophers have supposed.

[19]We also suspect the same applies "the Roman Vulcan," so to speak, for parallel reasons.

[20]These sorts of myths what we had in mind by "Kripkean mythical realism" in fn. 2, as opposed to "ecumenical mythical realism," which would lump together myths that aim to entertain (or morally instruct) with those that have overt explanatory aims, and which adds in failed scientific theorizing for bad measure.

scientific explanatory aspiration. In our view, myths that mainly aim to entertain or morally instruct (and include other typical elements of fictions) are, by and large, sufficiently fiction-like, so as to involve fictional characters. We think it would be beneficial to separate cases of mistaken (proto-) theorizing in which explanatory aims figure centrally, whether they occur in a mythical setting like the pagan invocation of Thor, or an overtly scientific setting, like Le Verrier's, from more "story-like" myths, like the myth of Sisyphus. Of course, many cases will be even more difficult than these to categorize.[21]

Inspired by David Braun's (2005, p. 615 and *passim*) discussion of these matters, we will classify those bits of folklore with overt quasi-scientific explanatory aims, together with failed scientific theories, as "mistaken theories." We will call the acts that produce such mistaken theories "mistaken theorizing." So, the supposed god of thunder and the hypothesized intra-Mercurial planet are both purported creatures of mistaken theorizing, whereas Holmes is a creature of fiction. And given the aims of the relevant myth, the myth of Sisyphus is more fiction-like than the myth of the god of thunder. We think that, as a result of the myth of Sisyphus's closer kinship with fiction, it is plausible to suppose that Sisyphus is a "creature of myth" that is more or less just like Holmes in the relevant respects.[22]

We are now able to characterize Ecumenical Realism more carefully as the conjunction of fictional realism, realism about creatures of folklore (regardless of explanatory aim), and realism about creatures of mistaken theorizing (regardless of whether the theorizing occurs in a mythologizing or in a scientific setting). We can contrast Ecumenical Realism with our preferred "sectarian" view, Sectarian Realism. According to Sectarian Realism, creatures of fiction, like Holmes, exist, as well as creatures of pieces of folklore that lack relevant explanatory aims, like Sisyphus. However, creatures of mistaken theorizing, like the intra-Mercurial planet and the purported god of thunder, do not exist. Note that, on *our* division, myths in particular, and folklore more generally, are split between those works with overtly science-like explanatory aims on the one hand (together with mistaken scientific theories), and those myths and bits of folklore with more "fictional" aims (together with, well, *fictions*), on the other. Mistaken theories versus fictional stories, on our scheme, instead of fictions versus myths-plus-failed-scientific theories, according to the way the Salmónians slice the pie.[23]

5. Arguing for Ecumenical Realism: David Braun's Elements of Storytelling

In "Empty Names, Fictional Names, Mythical Names," David Braun also argues for Ecumenical Realism:

> In both [cases of fictional storytelling and mistaken theorizing], names are used and predicative sentences containing them are formulated. Reasoning and other mental processes occur. Texts that are seemingly susceptible to evaluation for truth are produced. Thus, if storytellers' activities create fictional characters, then mistaken theorizers' activities create abstract objects of a similar sort. So I grant that Le Verrier's mistaken theorizing creates an abstract artifact. (Braun, 2005, p. 615)

Like Salmón, Braun is also arguing that there are creatures of mistaken theorizing because mistaken theorizing is similar in important respects to fictional storytelling. And we again follow Caplan's

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[21]Cf. Braun (2005, pp. 612–614).

[22]So the myth of Sisyphus is a "Kripkean" myth, in the sense of note 2. If you like, another way to characterize Sectarian Realism is as the combination of fictional realism and "Kripkean" mythical realism.

[23]With these further distinctions and clarifications in hand, we are now in a position to state our thesis a bit more carefully: We endorse Sectarian Realism while rejecting Ecumenical Realism. Even more carefully: We endorse creationism about "Sectarian" creatures, while rejecting creatures of mistaken theorizing, regardless of their alleged pedigree.

lead in presenting Braun's argument in a parallel manner (but updated with Braun's preferred terminology, *mistaken theorizer*, which we also prefer):

(P1) Authors create creatures of fiction.
(P3) If authors create creatures of fiction, then activities of mistaken theorizers create creatures of mistaken theorizing.
(C2) So, activities of mistaken theorizers create creatures of mistaken theorizing.

While Salmón seems to hold that mistaken theorizers are responsible for the existence of creatures of mistaken theorizing, Braun's overall view is more nuanced. It might be that, in some cases, the activities of others, in part as a reaction to the activities of mistaken theorizers, bring about creatures of mistaken theorizing.[24] However, setting such cases aside for now, we see the important difference between Braun's argument and Salmón's in terms of how they support the crucial premise. While Caplan sees Salmón's as relying on a parallel between the propositional attitudes of belief and make-belief, we might instead defend the crucial premise (P3) in Braun's argument as follows:

Suppose authors create creatures of fiction. The acts of creation those authors engage in are intimately related to their acts of (fictional) storytelling. And those acts of storytelling include (i) the use of names and predicative sentences containing them, (ii) their associated engagement in reasoning and other mental processes, and (iii) their production of (seemingly) truth-apt texts. But (i-iii) are also present in mistaken theorizing, such as in the cases of Le Verrier's mistaken scientific theorizing and folklorists' acts of storytelling that (seemingly) involve Thor. So, given their similarities, we should conclude that activities of mistaken theorizers (perhaps along with others) also create creatures of mistaken theorizing.

We might add on behalf of the proponent of this sort of argument, though Braun himself does not, that (i-iii) seem to capture everything important about the acts of fictional storytelling relevant to the creation of creatures of fiction by authors. But since all of these important aspects are also present in other forms of storytelling—those of the mistaken scientist or the folklorist with explanatory aims, in particular—we should conclude that these mistaken theorizers *also* manage to create creatures of mistaken theorizing. But if that is so, then (P3) is true.

   In response, we reject (P3). That is, we reject that, if authors create creatures of fiction, then activities of mistaken theorizers create creatures of mistaken theorizing. We have already noted some important differences as well as some superficial similarities between fiction and mistaken theorizing: All cases involve the production of a text, and the text produced is intended to be believed, or make-believed. And we agree that (i-iii) capture some important similarities across these diverse phenomena.

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[24]We think the issues are already complex enough while only focusing on "supply side" factors without also introducing "consumer side" complications. We suspect that the line we develop here could be used to support "consumer side" generation of what are commonly considered to be creatures of myth. We are not sure, though. And one potential important upshot of this is how it might factor into speakers' intuitions about, for example, the meaningfulness of "Vulcan" and related issues involving the broadly Quinean argument below.

   For an initiation into the foray of the role of complex interactions between agential intentions and conventions in production and creation, see, for example, Stojnić, 2019. Roughly, Stojnić defends a sort of ecumenical view of sorts regarding "intentionalists" and "conventionalists." This literature is truly massive, however. *Loci classici* include Grice (1975, 1989), Kratzer (1977), Stalnaker (1978), Lewis (1978b, 1980), and Kaplan (1989b). And besides, as the quote makes clear, Braun thinks Le Verrier's activities are sufficient to create Vulcan, presumably regardless of whatever effect "consumers" of Le Verrier's theory might have on Vulcan's ontological status.

However, we continue to think that there are important underlying differences. In order to bring these out in the context of the present argument, we will consider a series of cases involving the same orthographic string. Consider the following two lines:

> The therapy seemed to be working until I realized I was the patient, not the doctor. It got worse when I figured out I was just the chair.[25]

Suppose something orthographically similar to these two lines is produced entirely accidentally—let your imagination run wild. We think the accidentally produced string would not even be a text, or perhaps would only be a "text" by courtesy or "in an extended sense." We think it is clear that names and predicates are not used here, nor is anything truth-apt produced.[26] And we think this is *because* no relevant intentions were involved in the production of this "text." And so no story is created or produced either, to say nothing of characters.

Now, suppose an orthographic twin is intentionally produced, but with no other intention than to create just such an orthographic shape. Perhaps a monolingual Japanese artist produces the string because the artist finds the shapes involved particularly interesting or aesthetically pleasing. We also think, in such a case, no names are used, and nothing truth-apt is produced. Note that, in this case, intentions are present—*creative* intentions, including the intention to create an artwork—but even if some sort of "text" is created (we are less sure what to say in this case), no names, etc., are present. Note, too, that the intentional production of the mere orthographic string does not result in a *story*, and certainly not a *story with a protagonist.*

Now, suppose another orthographic twin is produced, but this time, it is backed by an intention that is a bit richer: the intention now is to produce two lines of English text, but that is it: no further plans aside from the concomitant intentions to produce syntactical noun and verb phrases and so on, resulting in a text that seems truth-apt. Perhaps a linguistics professor creates it as an example in a class on morphology. Suppose, further, the professor does not even understand English, but knows enough to produce a string of English expressions. Crucially, there is no intention to tell a *story* of any sort. There are, again, however, *creative* intentions—the intention to produce an example for class, or to simply create *two lines of English text.*

Notice in this case, each of Braun's (i-iii) appear to be present. It seems to us, though, that no *story* of any sort is produced, even if a text is (intentionally) produced via creative intentions. So the presence of (i-iii) is perhaps sufficient for the creation of some sort of artifact—a text—but, crucially, it seems insufficient to produce a *story* or *characters.*

Recall, however, that Braun's crucial premise relies on similarities between acts of *storytelling* that take place in the process of the creation of fictional characters and in mistaken theorizing. So maybe (i-iii) alone are not sufficient to create characters, but, perhaps, they *are* sufficient in the context of acts of *storytelling.*[27]

Consider yet another orthographic twin: Suppose this one is produced as a lie. We think a lie can count as a story—at least insofar as a mistaken scientific theory can.[28] So, this twin is a product of an act of storytelling backed by an intention that the resultant text is to be *believed.* In such a case, the truth-apt text produced is *false.* Furthermore, creative intentions are again at play—the intention to create a story, along with the intention to create a lie. But note that, here, there is no intention to

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[25]@VeryShortStory (Hill, 2013).

[26]We assume for present purposes that appropriate uses of "I" count as names. Though we do not think "I" *really* is a name, nothing hangs on that detail here.

[27]Though not yet sign of a serious problem for Braun's argument, it seems a bit odd that (i-iii) are not sufficient to produce a *story*, and yet those are the salient features of acts of storytelling that, when present in mistaken theorizing, are jointly sufficient for the creation of "characters" of mistaken theorizing. But we are unsure just what to make of that, so we are also setting this point aside.

[28]Regardless of whether a scientific theory is constructed with intent to deceive, a mistaken scientific theory is typically false but intended to be believed, and is in this particular respect much like a lie.

create *characters.* If the liar wishes the audience to believe the liar did thus-and-so, then the liar does not create a story involving some fictional character according to which the fictional character does thus-and-so. Rather, it is a story according to which *the liar* does thus-and-so.[29]

In this case, perhaps unlike the previous ones, there is an act of *storytelling* involving (i-iii), but, we think, no character is created. And this is because creative intentions *of the right sort* are not present. Mere intentions to create something—an orthographic string, a text, or even a *story*—are not sufficient to create *characters.* What is missing, we submit, is the intention *to create characters.*[30]

To see this, consider, finally, the same orthographic string, again, but now in the context of its actual creation. The string was created by @VeryShortStory and posted to X (née Twitter) *as a work of fiction.* The author intended the story to have a fictional protagonist, so, in our view, in virtue of creating the story, @VeryShortStory also created the parts of that story—the parts that were not imported, at least.[31] But the non-imported, *created* parts of the story include its plot, the situation we are invited to make-believe, and, we think, the story's protagonist. Crucially, the latter is brought about, in our view, by @VeryShortStory's intention to create a fictional story with a fictional protagonist.

And this is the crucial bit, because it seems the only relevant variables in our examples were the intentions that backed the production of the relevant orthographic strings. But the missing intention in all but the last case is: *the intention to create characters.* It is no coincidence, we think, that in each of the prior cases in which the relevant intentions are absent, what is also absent are *characters.*

We also think, in cases of mistaken theorizing, these "character-directed" creative intentions are largely or altogether absent. Instead of attempting to produce a text for use as a fictional story, Le Verrier, as with certain folklorists with explanatory aims, sought to produce a text with real-world explanatory aspirations. When the world is not cooperative, those aspirations are not met.

In our view, ultimately, the problem with Braun's argument is that it attempts to locate the important ingredients involved in character creation in the wrong aspects of acts of storytelling. We think, instead of Braun's (i-iii), the presence of character-directed creative intentions is what is crucial.[32] And that crucial element is lacking in central cases of mistaken theorizing, including failed scientific theories and myths or other bits of folklore with overarching explanatory aims.

We conclude that the argument from (P1) and (P3) to (C2) for Ecumenical Realism is unsound. Despite the similarities between acts of storytelling and acts of mistaken theorizing, there are important and ontologically significant differences between them. One important difference is that acts of storytelling typically involve character-directed creative intentions in a way that acts of mistaken theorizing do not. While we agree with Braun that further activities of, for example, commentators on mistaken theories introduce further complications, we think the argument considered here, which focuses on parallels between acts of storytelling and acts of mistaken theorizing, does not provide sound support for Ecumenical Realism.[33]

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[29]To bolster the point, note that if the liar were called out for misrepresentation, they could not deflect the charge by maintaining they were only talking about a fictional character, as opposed to misrepresenting themselves.

[30]The proposal is hardly original (see, e.g., Brock, 2010; Freidell, 2016). But there is an important hitch: being created is not essential to characters, since it is possible for a character to be merely produced. This complicates things. See below.

[31]Imported parts might include expressions of English, for example, and perhaps presumptions about how therapy works, etc.

[32]This overstates things. Character-directed creative intentions are not, strictly speaking, necessary for bringing about fictional characters. We elaborate below.

[33]We suspect that Braun's main interest in these issues is more semantical than metaphysical, though. He might have offered this sort of argument mainly to set the metaphysical issues more or less to one side, to see how the semantic chips fall, so to speak. For what it's worth, we almost completely agree with Braun's semantic claims even though we criticize his metaphysical argument here.

6. An Objection and a Reply: Inadvertent Character Production

Above, we appealed to *creative intentions of the right sort* as the ontologically significant difference-maker. But are such intentions *always* required in order to bring about fictional characters? Spoiler alert: No.

Braun (2005, pp. 610–12) considers a (perhaps actual) case of Doyle with inchoate creative intentions. Doyle may have lacked character-directed creative intentions when he began writing the Holmes stories. Perhaps he later came to have them, perhaps he did not. Either way, he may have generated Holmes stories prior to having character-directed creative intentions of the right sorts. Regardless, fictional realists should hold that Doyle's activities brought about Holmes.

Stuart Brock (2010) discusses the (imaginary) case of an author who is an anti-realist about fictional characters, and scrupulously avoids forming intentions to create creatures of fiction. They may go even further by making manifest their explicit intention to *not* bring about any fictional characters. But, much like a carpenter who produces a table, though they happen to be a compositional nihilist, Brock's discussion suggests that fictional realists should say that the anti-realist author also brings about fictional characters, despite their intentions.[34]

Zsófia Zvolenzsky (2016) discusses another (imaginary) case, in which Tolstoy mistakenly thought that Andrei Bolkonsky was a real person. Just as Tolstoy intended to include (the real) Napoleon as a character in *War and Peace*, he also intended Bolkonsky to be included as an "immigrant" in the fiction. As it happens, there is no real person that Tolstoy had in mind; Tolstoy is simply mistaken. Zvolenzsky argues (convincingly, by our lights) that Tolstoy inadvertently creates (better: *produces*) Bolkonsky as a character in the fiction.

Call cases like those described by Braun, Brock, and Zvolenzsky cases of *inadvertent character production*. We think fictional realists should accept the reality of inadvertent character production. This is an important notion. So, we think it is worthwhile to digress a bit to get clearer on how we are thinking about inadvertent character production.

6.1. A Productive Digression

Somehow or other, we can, and often do, produce things. Some one or more agents may produce a thing in the sense that, prior to a certain point in time, that thing was not in existence, but after that time, the thing came into existence due to the intentions and activities of those agents. Among such products are both creations and *mere* products; that is, products that are not also creations. Following Cray (2017), a mere product is not a result of the successful exercise of creative intentions, but is brought about nonetheless. Examples of mere products, in this sense, may include footprints left in the snow, the indentation produced on a seat cushion, or the gravitational force we come to exert on nearby objects. As the examples indicate, products may be produced voluntarily or involuntarily, advertently or inadvertently. Creations, by contrast, are products of creative intentions or intentional actions of the right sort.[35] Creations *typically* include various social constructs, such as money, nations, political parties, or establishments, as well as other various artifacts. Among creations are objects of art—paintings, sculptures, cast statues, musical works, works of fiction, and their characters. But, in *atypical* cases, like those described by Braun, Brock, and Zvolenzsky, characters are *produced* rather than created in the normal way by character-directed creative intentions. These are cases of inadvertent character production.

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[34]Compositional nihilists maintain that composition never occurs. Rather, on the most-discussed version of the view, where we ordinarily suppose there are composite objects, there are instead just mereological simples—entities that lack proper parts—arranged in various ways (see, e.g., Sider, 2013; van Inwagen, 1990).

[35]Note we do not define them as advertent products, on our usage.

6.2. Back to the Production already in progress

With the notion of inadvertent character production in hand, there now may seem to be a problem with our objections to the central premises (P2) and (P3) in the above arguments: Ecumenical Realists think that creatures like Vulcan and Thor come about in a way *very much like* inadvertent character production. They might agree that such cases are very different in certain respects from more standard cases of fictional creationism in which relevant creative intentions are at play. Nonetheless, there is still a powerful analogy between products of make-belief and belief, or acts of fictional storytelling and acts of mistaken theorizing, insofar as both may result in inadvertent character production.

We'll revisit this objection and have a bit more to say about it after considering the final argument for Ecumenical Realism. But for now, we want to offer an initial reply. Inadvertent character production importantly differs from mistaken theorizing by our lights. That is, of course, *not* because one, but not the other, involves character-directed creative intentions, since neither do. Rather, we think an important difference lies in the established *social practices* around fictional storytelling versus mistaken theorizing.[36] Our fictional storytelling practices involve the creation of stories that standardly include plots, characters, settings, and so on, that may bear no close connection to things in the extra-fictional world. While authors *can* create a story with a "real-life" plot but different characters (consider many movie adaptations of true events, with names and important details changed "to protect the innocent"), or a story with fictional characters in "real-world" settings (Spider-Man resides in New York and speaks English, according to the story), or "real-world" characters involved in fictional plots (*War and Peace*), doing so is optional; stories can be created from "whole cloth," as it were (where any resemblance to persons, etc., living or dead, is merely coincidental). We think a typical minimally successful fictional story-attempt results in the production of plot, character(s), setting(s), etc., *in part as a function of successful engagement with the established practice of fictional story-creation.* Part of the conditions for success include successful engagement with the established practice, where the practice may sometimes take the reins, so to speak, from an author who is in danger of otherwise going too far off-track. That is, despite an author's inattention, heterodox views, or other errors, which might otherwise thwart attempts at story-creation, the author successfully engaged with the established fictional storytelling practice can wind up bringing about a story *despite* themselves.[37]

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[36]We're not sure just how social practices work. But we think the following is true: Certain things, like citizenship, marriage, and professorships, to name just a few, would not exist were it not for the existence of the relevant social practices. And in order for one to be a citizen, be married, or be a professor involves engaging with the relevant social practice in the right way. (Or, for a marriage to exist requires some people engaging in the relevant practice in the right way.) Deliberate deployment of specific intentions may be more or less involved in "engagement in the right way." For example, one can become a citizen regardless of one's intentions by being born in a certain place. And one who "doesn't really believe in marriage" can wind up being married by participating in the relevant social practice, irrespective of their perhaps privately held "marriage anti-realism." Becoming a professor might require *lots* of deployment of intentions of the right sort, though we hear that during the 1960s one could end up becoming a professor despite oneself. And deliberate deployment of specific intentions may have been required in order to establish the relevant practice in the first place. But once the practices are up and running, so to speak, the right sort of engagement can result in novel properties (like being a citizen) or even novel *things* (like marriages, or, more to the present point, stories with characters). Thanks to Ben Caplan for discussion of these points.

[37]"*Author* successfully engaged with established practice" may need to be taken with a grain of salt. Though it is not our aim here to catalogue arguments for fictional realism, we want to mention an argument for fictional realism we find compelling and underappreciated, which relates to our claims about the powers of the practice of fictional storytelling. On September 19, 2023, the Authors Guild filed a lawsuit against OpenAI for copyright infringement. According to their press release, "For fiction writers, OpenAI's unauthorized use of their work is identity theft on a grand scale. Fiction authors create entirely new worlds from their imaginations—they create the places, the people, and the events in their stories …" (Authors Guild Press release, Sept. 20, 2023, "The Authors Guild", John Grisham, Jodi Picoult, David Baldacci, George R.R. Martin, and 13 Other Authors File Class-Action Suit Against OpenAI. https://authorsguild.org/news/ag-and-authors-file-class-action-suit-against-openai/) Though less frequently discussed in the literature, we think one powerful argument for realism about fictional characters comes from their legal status. There have been numerous well-known court cases regarding who legally owns a character or who is

We find the comparison with Brock's carpenter instructive. We think that, were no one ever to have had any sort of "table-directed creative intentions," the table-creating practice, in its current form, would not have come about. If people were always inveterate compositional nihilists, intent on rearranging simples "flat-surface-with-legs-wise, for the purposes of dining or working," the practice that would have been established would have been importantly different from our actual practice of table-creation, *even if the practice "looked" just the same.* Importantly, we think that, though the practice would typically result in the production of (what *we* might describe as) *things used as tables*, it would not typically result in the production of *tables.*[38]

In contrast, our actual practice has table creation as its explicit aim. It is typical that those who engage with the practice have table-directed creative intentions. We think it is this element of our established practice that enables nihilist carpenters to turn out tables despite their contrarian intentions. Similarly, we think that engagement with our actual storytelling practices, which themselves typically involve the intentional production of plot, character(s), and setting(s), is what enables the inattentive, metaphysically heterodox, or the misled to produce fictional characters, even if they lack character-directed creative intentions.

The practices established around explanatory projects, however, differ dramatically. The main aim of an explanatory project is typically a successful explanation—an accurate description of "extra-theoretical" reality. Recall Goodman's (2014: 39) point that Le Verrier was, if anything, intending *not* to create Vulcan. And while the intention to *not* create is not always satisfied (as in Brock's cases), we think creative intentions are relevant to the establishment of a creative practice of the sort we described, whereas "anti-creative" intentions, like Le Verrier's, are relevant to the establishment of essentially *uncreative* practice of theorizing (in the relevant sense). Engagement with the practice of fictional storytelling puts one "on track" to bring about fictional characters. To stretch the analogy with table production perhaps a bit too far, intending to create a fictional story while intending not to create characters is a bit like intending to create a table with no legs—if you manage to create the table, you create the legs, too, regardless of your intentions toward their creation. Engagement with the explanatory practice of theorizing does not similarly put one "on track" to bring about creatures of mistaken theorizing.[39]

When we "zoom in" on phenomena of inadvertent production, examples from fiction may look *a lot* like some cases of mistaken theorizing, in just the ways pointed out by the authors we have been considering. Authors and theorizers create texts as a result of doxastic or quasi-doxastic attitudes, and those texts include "figures" (roughly, characters and "theoretical posits"). The texts in question seem truth-apt, but false. Furthermore, the production of the texts involves the uses of names and predicative sentences containing them, and reasoning and other mental processes take place. Viewed "up close," fictional stories and mistaken theories have a lot in common.

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legally entitled to recognition as a character's creator. We think the mere fact that characters are by and large collectively and uncontroversially regarded as entities for legal and other social purposes is an overlooked point in support of fictional realism. (And to echo a point due to Thomasson (1999) and Salmón (1998 (Reprinted in (2005b))), we have basically parallel reasons to believe in the real existence of other "social constructions," such as money and marriages, courts and credit card accounts, and *laws themselves*, for that matter.) And while the lawsuit does not also allege that an LLM or AI has been responsible for bringing about a new *character* based on the work of a (human) author, we figure it is only a matter of time. We think the discussion in this section of the paper tentatively suggests that AIs and LLMs *can* produce fictional characters, but only as a result of engaging with the established practice of fictional storytelling in the right way. So character production by non-humans may only be possible because of the prior creative work of (human) authors. The (human) authors might want to keep their lawyers on retainer.

[38]Cf. Evnine, 2016.

[39]Note here our focus is on the practice of theorizing, and the consequences for *mistaken* theorizing. But, as Goodman (2014) points out, if the practice of theorizing is itself creative, then it seems it is not only when theorizing is mistaken that creatures of theorizing are brought about. Awkwardly, it would seem that Le Verrier's *successful* theorizing regarding Neptune not only resulted in the discovery of Neptune, but also the inadvertent creation of Neptune-as-a-creature-of-theorizing—an "abstract artifact," perhaps. We invite you to join Goodman, and us, in an incredulous stare. (Cf. Braun, 2005, p. 627, fn. 34; Salmón, 2015, p. 119.)

But when we "zoom out," we see that cases of inadvertent production in fiction occur in the context of what is *essentially* a creative practice.[40] When a would-be author does most of what needs to be done to produce a story while engaged in our fictional storytelling practice, elements of the story may be produced rather than (more or less) explicitly created. But that is due to the nature of the creative practice of fictional storytelling. It does not similarly apply to explanatory practices, which are uncreative or even *anti*-creative in the relevant sense.

So, to sum up, despite the apparent similarities between cases of fictional storytelling and cases of mistaken theorizing, *typical* cases of fictional storytelling importantly differ from typical cases of mistaken theorizing in myriad ways. We think these (interrelated) differences, clustering around authors' character-directed creative intentions, are ontologically significant.

We agree, though, that there are *atypical* cases of fictional storytelling that result in inadvertent character production. As such, character-directed creative intentions are not necessary for fictional character creation.[41] So, is there an important difference between cases of inadvertent production of fictional characters and cases of mistaken theorizing? Yes. Fictional storytelling is a creative practice in a way that theorizing is not, and this plays a role in inadvertent creation. While creative intentions do not play a *direct* role in these cases, they play an indirect role in shaping the fictional storytelling practice. We think this difference, too, is ontologically significant. In the next section, we turn to our final argument for Ecumenical Realism before returning to the issue of inadvertent production. We will close by considering an important objection to Sectarian Realism.

7. Arguing for Ecumenical Realism: Creation of the Whole is Creation of the Parts

Authors of fiction create more than texts when they write. They also create stories. Stories that can be told and retold, changed, and adapted in various ways. For example, when Doyle wrote the text for *A Study in Scarlet*, he also created a story. That story has been told and retold many times and adapted to radio, film, and television. But what *are* stories? Cowling and Cray (2022) suggest a "neo-idealist" theory of stories; according to it, stories are *ideas for narrative manifestation*.[42] When Doyle wrote *A Study in Scarlet*, he became the first person to have a particular idea; an idea that involved some combination of various narrative elements such as characters, settings, events, and themes. That idea was manifested in his text, and the text became the initial medium by which that idea was passed along to others. The same idea was later manifested on radio, film, and television. That idea *is* the story of *A Study in Scarlet*.[43]

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[40]In service of a point at odds with the present one, Zvolenszky (2016, pp. 326–327) mentions *several* creative practices (involving songs, poems, polysemes, words, and proper names) that we agree all involve inadvertent production (she calls the phenomenon "inadvertent creation"). But we think, crucially, production was successful in each case in part because our artistic and dynamic lexical practices are *creative* practices, in a way that our explanatory practices, especially those of scientific theorizing, are *not*. So, despite something's going wrong in some way, engagement with creative practice results in the generation of new songs, poems, lexemes, characters, etc.

[41]That is to say, a character can be produced in the absence of character-directed creative intentions centred on *it*. But, since we think this can only occur in a setting in which there is the right sort of established creative practice, we do not think it would be possible to produce a fictional character in a world entirely devoid of character-directed creative intentions altogether.

[42]Cowling and Cray (2022) develop the proposal in Cray (2019).

[43]*Ideas* here are not conceived of as traditional abstract entities, but instead as real, historical individuals, broadly along the lines of Rohrbaugh (2003), and less broadly along the lines of Cray (2014), Cray and Schroeder (2015), Everett and Schroeder (2015), Cray and Matheson (2017), and Cray (2019). Cowling and Cray (2022, pp. 293–294) elaborate:

(R)ather than taking ideas to be private mental particulars, … this view hangs on a different conception of what ideas are … Quite unlike private mental particulars, ideas in *this* sense are taken to be shareable, public artifacts. Ideas are things we come up with, sometimes together. They are things that can be bounced around, so to speak, and can spread to new places over time. We can trace their development through history and across cultures. And, despite being dependent on mental activity, they can nonetheless exist independently of the mind of any one particular thinker.

What exactly are these things, ontologically speaking? According to the *idealist* about stories, an idea is a system of particular concrete mental states that all share content. In conceiving of mental states as concrete, the view takes them to

A story, on this view, must involve various narrative elements, typically including characters. As we have argued, it is not implausible to think that when a story involving a certain character is created, then that character is also thereby created (assuming the character does not already exist). Or at the very least, that character comes into existence as a *byproduct* of the creation of the story and are inadvertently produced in the above sense. After all, the whole cannot exist without its parts.

Similarly, theorizers create theories. Theories can be told and retold, changed, and adapted in various ways. What are these theories? One might think, along the lines of Cray and Schroeder (2015), that theories, too, are ideas—ideas that involve, at the very least, some combination of explanatory elements including objects, features, events, and causes. It is not implausible to think that when a theory is created, its various components that are not already in existence must be created, or at the very least produced. After all, the whole cannot exist without its parts.

This all suggests the following argument:[44]

(P4) Authors produce creatures of fiction as parts of stories when they create those stories.

(P5) If authors produce creatures of fiction as parts of stories when they create those stories, then mistaken theorizers produce creatures of mistaken theorizing as parts of false theories when they create those theories.

(C3) So, mistaken theorizers produce creatures of mistaken theorizing as parts of false theories when they create those theories.

Let us think a little bit more about the parts that are necessary for the whole. Consider Doyle again. In order to have the idea, that is, the story *A Study in Scarlet*, he had to have ideas of its various narrative elements: a "Holmes-idea," a "Watson-idea," a "Lestrade-idea," etc., and an idea of how the contents of those elements combined together. These ideas are literal parts of a larger whole idea that is *A Study in Scarlet*.[45] Similarly, when Le Verrier came up with his theory about the perturbations in the orbit of Mercury, he had to have various ideas: perhaps these included a "Mercury-idea," a "Vulcan-idea," and an idea of how the contents of those elements fit together. Those *ideas* are literal parts of the larger idea that is Le Verrier's theory.

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be identifiable with literal (particular) brain states … (I)nsofar as these particular brain states share their content, they are all *about* the same thing. If you have a brain states of *belief*, that belief is targeted at something—it is *about* something … To say, then, that these particular physical brain states share the same content is just to say that they are all pointed at the same thing, that is, whatever it is that they are about. So, according to the idealist view: an idea is a bunch of particular, physical brain states that are all about the same thing.

It's not just any bunch, though … it's a system of such things. The word 'system' can take on many meanings but for now, we'll follow Everett and Schroeder (2015) and others in taking a system to be a causally and historically interrelated cluster of states that are all about the same thing. On this view, the idea originates when a particular thinker (or some particular thinkers, acting in unison) comes into an appropriately novel mental state. But then, through acts of communication, other thinkers are caused to come to have particular mental states that share content with that original, novel mental state—and in doing so, the system grows.

Communication continues, and as more thinkers come to have mental states with the same content, causally and historically traceable back to that original mental state, the system continues to spread. And that system itself, on this view, *is* the idea. So, crucially, ideas are physical entities, rather than abstract entities, and, furthermore, they are public, shareable artifacts in the sense that, in principle, anyone can enter into an appropriate brain state. Now, one need not accept exactly this account of ideas in order to accept the version of idealism sketched here. As long as you have a satisfying account of ideas as physical, public, shareable artifacts, you'll have what you need. (Editing due to Tillman and Spencer.)

As it happens, *we* do not accept the view exactly as stated, but we reproduce it here since it is important to the discussion, as well as a bit unorthodox.

[44]Again, neither Cowling or Cray, to the best of our knowledge, endorse the following argument. Rather, it was inspired by their views on the metaphysics of stories in their 2022 and related views defended in Cray (2014), Everett and Schroeder (2015), Cray and Schroeder (2015), Cray and Matheson (2017), and Cray (2017, 2019).

[45]Everett and Schroeder (2015) defend this sort of view. Salmón (2015, p. 119) explicitly disavows the parallel view for "mythical objects," though not for the reasons we do.

One might think that the character of Sherlock Holmes just *is* the Holmes-idea. This certainly seems to fit with how some people think about fictional characters.[46] But it does not fit with others. Consider a famous dispute between Stan Lee and Steve Ditko over the creation of Spider-Man. Stan Lee succinctly sums up the dispute as follows:

> Steve had said having an idea is nothing because until it becomes a physical thing it's just an idea, and he said it took him to draw the strip and to give it life, so to speak, or to make it actually something tangible, otherwise all I had was an idea. So, I said to him, 'Well, I think the person with the idea is the person who creates it,' and he said, 'No, because I drew it'.[47]

Clearly, Stan Lee thinks that having the idea of a character is sufficient for creating the character. Stan Lee's thesis about creation would make a lot of sense if the fictional character just *is* the character idea. Ditko, on the other hand, thinks that something more needs to be done to create a character. In addition to having an idea, one must manifest the idea in a tangible way. That suggests, instead, that a fictional character cannot just *be* the character idea.[48] Rather than recapitulate Ditko's defense of his view, we think it's better to just let Ditko speak for himself, as it were:
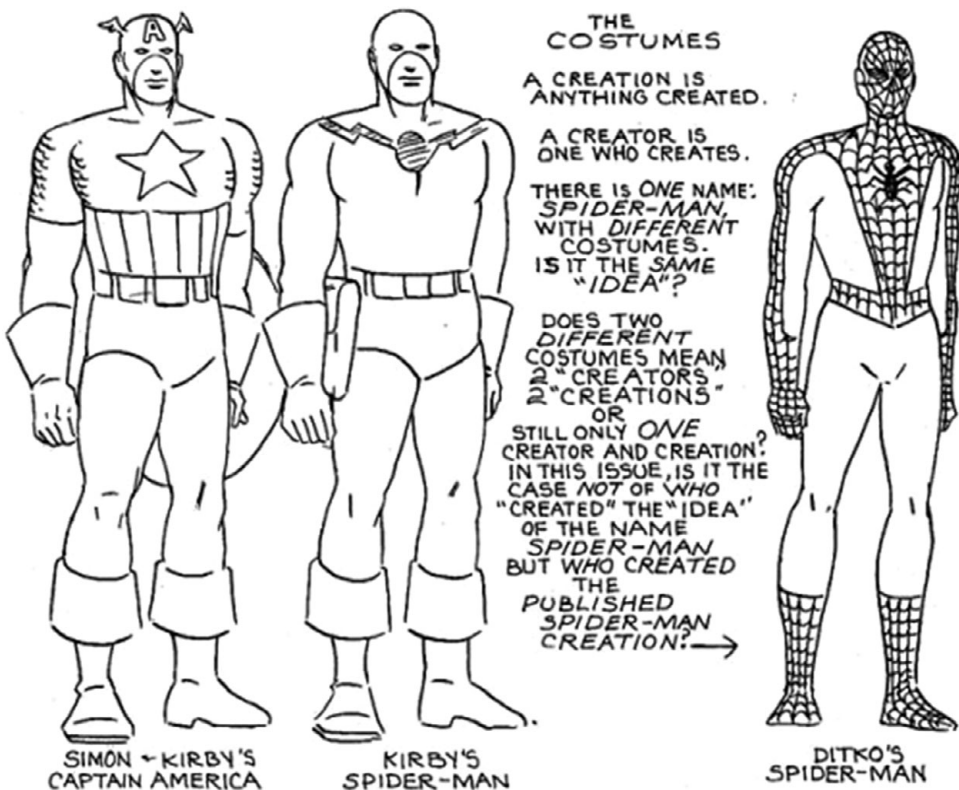

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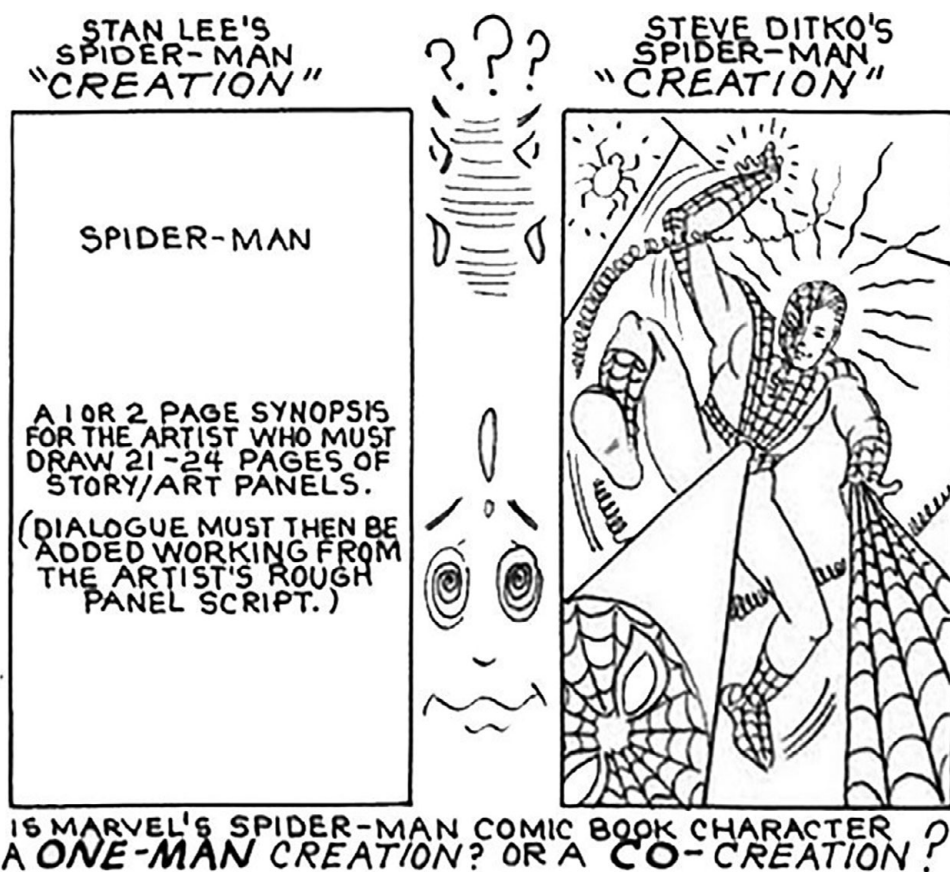
[46]Cf. Everett and Schroeder (2015). In regard to fictional characters, some of Cowling and Cray are some such people (p.c.).
[47]Stan Lee in an interview with Jonathan Ross in the 2007 BBC documentary *In Search of Steve Ditko*.
[48]This is just a suggestion, though. Ditko's point about something's needing to be manifested in the right way in order to be a character is consistent with the view that characters are just ideas. Perhaps, even if characters are just ideas, in order to *become* a character, an idea has to be manifested along the lines suggested by Ditko.

THE COSTUMES

A CREATION IS ANYTHING CREATED.

A CREATOR IS ONE WHO CREATES.

THERE IS *ONE* NAME: SPIDER-MAN, WITH *DIFFERENT* COSTUMES. IS IT THE *SAME* "IDEA"?

DOES TWO *DIFFERENT* COSTUMES MEAN 2 "CREATORS" 2 "CREATIONS" OR STILL ONLY *ONE* CREATOR AND CREATION? IN THIS ISSUE, IS IT THE CASE *NOT* OF WHO "CREATED" THE "IDEA" OF THE NAME SPIDER-MAN BUT WHO CREATED THE PUBLISHED SPIDER-MAN CREATION? →

SIMON ~ KIRBY'S CAPTAIN AMERICA   KIRBY'S SPIDER-MAN   DITKO'S SPIDER-MAN

We are somewhat sympathetic to Ditko's position. For example, it does not seem implausible to think that Sherlock Holmes is what the Holmes-idea is an idea *of*, rather than the idea itself. But that's harder to square with Lee's view. And similarly, Vulcan, were it to have existed, would presumably be what the Vulcan-idea was an idea *of*. We grant that the Holmes-idea must have been created when the story of *A Study in Scarlet* was created. And similarly, the Vulcan-idea must have been created when the theory of certain orbital perturbations was created. But it does not follow that a creature of mistaken theorizing was thereby created, or that Le Verrier created *anything* relevant beyond the idea.

Ultimately, though, we aren't completely opposed to Lee's "Fictional Idealism," as we might call it.[49] Maybe Sherlock Holmes is the Holmes-idea and maybe, generally, merely fictional characters are identical to character-ideas. So let us assume, for the sake of argument, that authors produce creatures of fiction as parts of stories when they create those stories. We deny that, if that is so, then mistaken theorizers produce creatures of mistaken theorizing as parts of false theories when they create those theories. That is, we deny (P5).

We think it is pretty plausible to suppose that Fictional Idealism is true, and Doyle creates Holmes by creating the Holmes-idea, because Holmes *is* the Holmes-idea. However, it seems

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[49]It's important to keep in mind that Fictional Idealism, on this usage, is a species of fictional *realism* on which creatures of fiction are (real) *ideas*. We are emphatically *not* contrasting the *real* with the ideal (cf. and Braun, 2021; Everett & Schroeder, 2015). As far as we can tell, Fictional Idealism, as well as Ditko's variant, count as species of "intentional artifact theory," in Braun's (2021, p. 375 and *passim*) sense.

implausible to us to think that *Vulcan* is identical to the Vulcan-idea. This is so for two main reasons.[50]

First, and perhaps most importantly, we think that, if Vulcan is produced by Le Verrier on something like the model whereby Doyle produced Holmes, as *all* of the arguments for Ecumenical Realism that we have considered suggest, then that is either because Le Verrier produced Vulcan by *creating* Vulcan, or Le Verrier *merely* produced Vulcan.

Suppose Le Verrier created Vulcan. Then Le Verrier had something like character-directed creative intentions toward the main "figure" in his theory, in much the same way that it is plausible to suppose that Doyle had character-directed creative intentions toward the main character of his story. But we think this is implausible for the reasons we have discussed. Chief among them is that Le Verrier likely harbored *anti-creative* intentions toward the main "figure" in his theory.

Suppose instead that Le Verrier *merely* produced Vulcan. But then Le Verrier produced the text he did in the context of successful engagement with a creative practice. But we do not think that is right, either, for the reasons we have discussed. Chief among them is that Le Verrier produced his text in the context of theorizing, a practice with overt explanatory aims, which is not creative in the relevant sense.

Our second main reason for thinking the analog of Fictional Idealism does not hold for mistaken theories ("Mistaken Theory Idealism") is because we think that, while the Holmes-idea is apt to serve as the fictional character Holmes, Le Verrier's Vulcan-idea is not similarly apt to serve as the titular figure in Le Verrier's "Vulcan Theory." We think that, in fictional cases, since we are just *pretending* that something is some way, it matters less what that "something" is, becasue practically *anything* can potentially serve as a "prop in a game of make-believe."[51] But things are different in the case of theorizing. After all, Le Verrier hypothesized that Vulcan orbits the sun and causes perturbations in the orbit of Mercury. But whereas Doyle might have imagined that the idea he came up with smoked and consulted, it is not similarly plausible to suppose that Le Verrier thought that the idea he came up with orbits or perturbs. Similarly, it was thought by pagan myth-makers that Thor caused thunder. And while myth-makers thought *something* causes thunder, and that that thing was a god, presumably, they did not think that the idea they just came up with for what causes thunder caused thunder. So, even if Lee's Fictional Idealism is plausible, it seems less plausible to hold a corresponding "Mistaken Theory Idealism."

We would like to stress that our objection here is *not* the following:[52]

> Le Verrier's Vulcan-idea cannot be the Ecumenical Realist's "creature of mistaken theorizing" because, as an idea, it cannot possibly have the features an intra-Mercurial planet would have, and it would be psychologically impossible for a rational person to believe that an idea perturbs the orbit of Mercury.

The problem is not that the Vulcan-idea, intrinsically, is the wrong sort of thing. Nor is the problem that agents should be able to determine "from the inside" that their psychological states and propositional attitudes predicate features of things that no reasonable person would believe those things can have. After all, such states are not plausibly transparent in that way. Rather, basically for the reasons Braun, 2005 holds that Le Verrier did not *refer* to Vulcan, we think nothing "Vulcan-ish" *can* be the target of Le Verrier's intentions in the way it would need to be in order for Le Verrier to have created it broadly in the way authors create characters. Supposing Le Verrier sought to name an intra-Mercurial planet, if there is one, and nothing otherwise, then *nothing* "Vulcan-ish,"

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[50]Thanks to David Braun for help with the remainder of this section.
[51]The locution is due to Walton (1990). Cf. Salmón (2023, 9–10).
[52]Tobias Klauk (2014) raises a related objection to a similar aspect of Zalta's (1983) view. We endorse Salmón's reply in his 2023, and would also add explanatory elements from Braun (1998, 2002, 2005) in a complete response.

including the Vulcan-idea Le Verrier *did* plausibly create, or any sort of "abstract artifact" of the kind Ecumenical Realists discuss, is apt to serve as a creature of Le Verrier's mistaken theorizing.[53]

Separating cases, it seems implausible to hold that Le Verrier's Vulcan is identical to the Vulcan-idea and it seems very questionable to hold that Thor is identical to the Thor-idea. We think the point generalizes: while it is plausible to suppose that fictional characters are closely tied to fictional character-ideas (perhaps by the tie of numerical identity!), it is implausible to suppose that creatures of mistaken theorizing are so closely tied to ideas. So we conclude that the argument from (P4) and (P5) to (C3) for Ecumenical Realism is unsound, as well, since (P5) is false.[54]

8. Immigration Issues

We have argued, in effect, for Sectarian Realism, according to which creatures of fiction exist, while creatures of mistaken theorizing, and many creatures of myth, do not. But the threat of sectarian violence is close at hand.

Some characters are *indigenous* to stories, whereas other characters are *immigrants.* For example, Hulk and Spider-Man are both indigenous to Marvel Comics, first appearing in *The Incredible Hulk* #1 and *Amazing Fantasy* #15, respectively. However, David Letterman and Justin Trudeau are both immigrants to Marvel Comics; they are real people who appeared in issues of Marvel Comics.[55] But some immigrants to fiction appear to immigrate from "realms" other than the extra-fictional world. For example, Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill's *League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* stars several characters who originated from 19th century fiction, including Brahm Stoker's Nina Murray and Jules Verne's Captain Nemo.[56]

What about Thor? Thor first appeared as a character in Marvel Comics in *Journey into Mystery* #83, and is a founding member of the *Avengers.* So, it would seem, fictional realists like us should countenance Thor. But it appears as if Thor is an immigrant from pagan mythology. If Thor is an immigrant from pagan mythology, then Thor must have existed as a part of pagan mythology. And if Thor existed as part of pagan mythology, then Thor must have been created by the original pagan myth-makers. So, one may be tempted to conclude, if fictional realists are welcoming towards immigrants, then they must be welcoming to creatures of mistaken theorizing, as well. We have argued, though, against somewhat similar cases for Ecumenical Realism. Moreover, given the explanatory aims of the Thor myth and the lack of creative intentions backing up our explanatory practices, we do not think that Thor was created or produced by those myth-makers.

One might respond to this challenge by denying that there are any immigrants at all. One might distinguish between, for example, Justin Trudeau—the Marvel fictional character—and Justin Trudeau—the real prime minister of Canada. Similarly, one might distinguish between Thor—the Marvel fictional character—and any putative creatures of mythology. If there are no immigrants at all, then there is no problem for our brand of Sectarian Realism.

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[53]Cf. Braun (2005, pp. 615–618).

[54]The final argument we are aware of for Ecumenical Realism is a Quine-and-van Inwagen-style argument from ontological commitment (see, e.g., Quine, 1948; van Inwagen, 1977 (Reprinted in (2001)), 2003). In the context of the history of science, we might encounter claims like "Vulcan was hypothesized to be a planet, while Glibglam was not." A familiar case can be made that we are thereby ontologically committed to Vulcan, and so Vulcan exists. This argument differs in important ways from the arguments we have considered here, which all rest on an analogy between fictional storytelling and mistaken theorizing in a way that this argument does not. However, it is worth briefly mentioning here, mainly due to its importance. We think it is a cost to deny apparent truths, like the foregoing claim regarding Vulcan and Glibglam. But we think the cost is worth bearing. Note the case is not univocal—historians of science might also say things like "Vulcan does not exist," to the universal, bored assent of their colleagues. See especially Braun (2005) regarding speakers" apparently contradictory practices and attitudes involving seemingly empty (uses of) names, and Braun and Saul (2002) regarding mistaken evaluations broadly of this sort. Thanks to Sam Cowling for pressing us on this.

[55]Letterman appeared in *Avengers* #239 and Trudeau appears in *Civil War II: Choosing Sides* #5.

[56]Murray and Nemo are immigrants from *Dracula* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Seas*, respectively.

But we do not think that is the right response to this anti-Sectarian challenge. To see why, note that practically everyone agrees on the following: Spider-Man is depicted as taking place in New York, Spider-Man is depicted as speaking English, and Spider-Man's outfit is depicted as being red. Those who endorse the anti-immigration policy will claim, *at best*, that Spider-Man is depicted as taking place in New York by way of representations of a fictional city, Spider-Man is depicted as speaking English by way of representations of a fictional language, and Spider-Man's outfit is depicted as being red by way of representations of a fictional color. But we think that Spider-Man is depicted as taking place in New York by way of representations *of New York*, Spider-Man is depicted as speaking English by way of representations *of English*, and Spider-Man's outfit is depicted as red by way of representations *of red*. To claim otherwise seems overly complicated as well as more than a little absurd. Thus, we advocate open borders and welcome immigrants.[57]

Where does that leave Thor, so to speak? Thor seems to be an immigrant from bits of folklore that engaged in mistaken theorizing. And we doubt there are any such things. So, if Thor is an immigrant, where did he immigrate *from*? The Ecumenical Realist has a relatively easy time here—there was this character from myth who later became a character in a fiction. But that explanation is not available to us Sectarians. What to do?

Although we believe that there are immigrants in fiction, we do not think that Thor is an immigrant to Marvel Comics. Or, rather, we do not think that Thor is an immigrant in the relevant sense. What seems right to us is that Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, who created the Thor stories for *Marvel*, intended to write a fiction, and they were inspired by pagan mythology.[58] Whether they intended to tell a story about an already existing creature of mythology is unclear. If they intended to *create* a character *inspired* by the pagan myths, then there is no problem here for Sectarian Realists. Thor would not, in that case, be an immigrant. Instead, Thor would be a creation of Lee and Kirby and would be indigenous to *Journey into Mystery* #83. But suppose that they really did fully intend to bring Thor from the realm of myths to the realm of Marvel Comics; suppose they intended to immigrate Thor from pagan myths to Marvel Comics. What could we say in that case?

Well, there are a lot of intentions involved in the creation of a story. In this case, it seems clear that Lee and Kirby intended to create and tell a fictional story. Perhaps they intended that story to be about an already existing creature of myth. But we do not think that there was any creature of myth around to be the target of their intentions. In that case, given our established fictional storytelling practices, their intention to create a story was a sort of dominating intention, and Thor—the fictional character—was a byproduct of that intention. So, even if they did not intend to create a fictional character, we think that a fictional character was nevertheless brought into existence, as in our analogy above involving tables. This, we think, is perhaps another example of character *production* in the absence of character-directed creative intentions, as we discussed above in replying to Braun's argument for Ecumenical Realism.

Allow us to elaborate. We like Cowling and Cray's (2022) view that stories are ideas for narrative manifestation—ideas made up of some combination of further ideas related to various narrative elements such as characters, settings, events, and perhaps themes. Let us consider how our fictional storytelling practices can help to bring the various elements of a story together into an idea for narrative manifestation. Sometimes, an author intends to create certain characters, or settings, or events. Other times, an author intends to immigrate certain characters, or settings, or events.[59] Let

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[57]In addition, an author can genuinely and fully intend to tell a story about a real individual. We do not see any reason to think that such intentions would fail. Second, and relatedly, it seems clear that we can give an account of some real events involving, for example, the real Justin Trudeau. In that case, we are telling a true story about him. We could even embellish that story a bit by adding slightly inaccurate or distorted details. In that case, we would still have a true story about the real Justin Trudeau. But now we are well on our way to generating a sorites-like series at the end of which is a fully fictional story about the real Justin Trudeau.

[58]Wikipedia concurs: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thor_(Marvel_Comics).

[59]Doyle, for example, plausibly intended to *create* the character of Sherlock Holmes, but "immigrate" the setting of London.

us focus on the characters. When an author intends to create a character and produces the right sorts of elements, such as notes or drawings that would properly convey the idea that the author has for the character, then the author thereby creates the character. When there is an individual that an author intends to immigrate as a character, and the author produces the right sorts of elements that would properly convey the idea of that individual, then the author thereby immigrates that individual as a character. But when an author intends to immigrate an individual as a character, *and there is no such individual to immigrate*, then something else happens. Suppose the author has an idea that the author takes to be an idea of an already existing individual. And suppose that the author produces the right sort of elements that would properly convey that idea. And finally, suppose that this is all done while intentionally and successfully writing fiction, as part of the practice of fictional storytelling. Then, in that case, the author inadvertently produces a character. We believe that if Lee and Kirby really did intend to immigrate Thor from pagan myths, then, as a consequence of their overall authorial intentions, productions, and with the aid of our storytelling practices, they might have instead produced Thor as a fictional character.[60]

9. An Objection and a Reply Revisited

Recall, above, we considered an objection to our replies to Salmón, Caplan, and Braun. According to that objection, we cannot rely on creative intentions of the right sort to explain the differences between cases where fictional realists say a fictional character is created and cases where Ecumenical Realists say a creature of mistaken theorizing is created, too. In light of our discussion of Cray and Schroeder's (2015) view of theories as ideas, and Cowling and Cray's (2022) extension of that idea to stories, we can say more about what we consider to be among the crucial differences between cases involving fictional storytelling versus those involving mistaken theorizing.[61]

When Lee and Kirby created *Journey into Mystery* #83, they created a story. Following Cowling and Cray (2022), suppose that the story is an idea. And, in line with the previous section, suppose that story-idea includes a Thor-idea. The Thor-idea may have existed previously, and Lee and Kirby may have pressed it into service as (perhaps) an idea of an (eventual) Avenger.[62] Now suppose, for relative simplicity, that Lee's Fictional Idealism is true and creating a character-idea suffices for creating a character, even in the absence of appropriate drawings, and so forth. Then we are in a position to identify another way in which a sort of inadvertent production of fictional characters may occur, even while a parallel inadvertent production of a creature of mistaken theorizing would not. In Fictional Idealism, *the Thor-idea is the sort of thing that is apt to serve as the fictional character*. When it is pressed into service by Lee and Kirby as part of a story idea, it *becomes* a fictional character. In that sense, a fictional character is inadvertently produced. But as we have argued, "Mistaken Theory Idealism" is false; hence, the Thor-idea was not apt to be a creature of mistaken theorizing while it was embedded in the quasi-explanatory project of the pagan myth it originated in. So, whereas the Thor-idea might have been produced by myth-makers as part of their explanatory practices, no *creature of myth* was thereby produced.

We could, similarly, appropriate Le Verrier's Vulcan-idea, and press it into service as a character in the context of fiction. In fact, we think something like this may be what actually happened in the case of Harl Vincent's (1932) story, "Vulcan's Workshop."[63] So, on this proposal, perhaps Le

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[60]One way of locating our difference with Ecumenical Realists, then, is that we think inadvertent creation or character production is relatively special and rare, whereas the Ecumenical Realist thinks it is relatively mundane and ubiquitous.

[61]See also Everett and Schroeder (2015) and Cray (2019).

[62]Thor's first appearance in Marvel Comics was in *Journey into Mystery* #83, published in August 1962. Thor was a founding member of the Avengers and appeared in *Avengers* #1 in September 1963.

[63]Cf. Everett and Schroeder (2015, pp. 281–282). One might worry that this line threatens immigrants: if, so to speak, Vulcan and Thor can be "immigrants" via a Vulcan-idea or a Thor-idea, then are e.g. Letterman-, Trudeau-, and Napoleon-ideas characters in fictions, as opposed to Letterman, Trudeau, and Napoleon themselves? We think not, since we suspect authors

Verrier created a Vulcan-idea,[64] but his activities did not bring about anything that answered that idea; his uses of "Vulcan" in "Vulcan est une planète" were empty, and his utterance perhaps expressed and encoded a gappy proposition.[65] But when that idea spread to Vincent, Vincent instead used it as a central character in a work of fiction that he created.

One thing that is nice about this story is that we can see *how* fictions can borrow from myths and false scientific theories. And we can see *a sense* in which certain creatures of fiction are immigrants from myths or false scientific theories. What fictions borrow are the ideas. Those *ideas* immigrate from mistaken theories to the fictions. Given Fictional Idealism, those ideas *become* fictional characters. But, crucially, those ideas were never the things posited to exist by mistaken theorizing, and, given theorizers' typical intentions, there is nothing that their ideas are ideas *of*.

Though many antecedents need yet to be discharged, on this line, the *ontology* of fiction and mistaken theorizing may be quite similar. Ideas would serve as fictional characters in the context of fictional storytelling, while those same ideas would be *in*apt to serve as creatures of mistaken theorizing, due to (i) facts about the practices of fictional storytelling versus theorizing, (ii) the intentions of authors versus theorizers, and (iii) the unsuitability of ideas as objects of theorizing, even while they might be well-suited to playing the role of characters in fictions. In a way, then, perhaps even the Sectarian Realist may be able to strike an ecumenical chord.

10. Conclusion

In the end, though, even if Sectarians and the Ecumenical can find some common ground, important differences remain. We conclude that arguments for Ecumenical Realism that rest on analogies between fictional storytelling and mistaken theorizing are unsound. Whereas authors bring about artifacts replete with plots, characters, and settings—often melding the indigenous with newcomers—mistaken theorists bring about artifacts that are mere texts with explanatory aims. Since the theorists are mistaken, their explanatory aims failed, and the relevant posits of

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intended to include *people* (as opposed to merely ideas of them) in their stories. More importantly, perhaps, on this combination of views, we think it is natural to suppose that the characters of a story are whatever the character-ideas of that story are ideas *of*. When characters are immigrants, the character-ideas can be ideas of real people. But, given Fictional Idealism, when character-ideas are not ideas of something else, they serve as ideas of themselves, making those ideas themselves the characters. (It is helpful here to sharply distinguish between (i) taking an x-idea and using it as a character in a story, like how Vincent perhaps took Le Verrier's Vulcan-idea and used it in his story, versus (ii) having an idea to use x as a character in a story, like how Tolstoy had the idea to use Napoleon as a character in *War and Peace*.) Finally, such a view would seem to further exacerbate the unattractive consequence of Ecumenical Realism discussed in fn. 38, according to which even *successful* theorizing generates "creatures of theorizing," on which extra-theoretical entities have numerically distinct "theoretical" counterparts. If characters are not ideas but are instead what character-ideas are ideas *of*, we think it would be undesirable to maintain that, in addition to the real Napoleon, there was also the fictional character created by Tolstoy that is what the Napoleon-idea that figures into *War and Peace* is an idea *of*. This is all perhaps a bit speculative and there is much more to be said. It is also worth emphasizing that we consider this to be a special case, assuming Cowling and Cray's (2022) metaphysics of stories. Even if characters "default" to character-ideas, we do not think similar mechanisms are at play with respect to other, seemingly related, phenomena. For instance, also we do not think that ideas could also serve as suitable default referents for apparently empty uses of names, broadly for the sorts of reasons adumbrated in Braun (2005).

[64]Or, perhaps, Le Verrier repurposed the idea from Roman mythology. We doubt it, though. Instead of taking the idea from Roman mythology and redeploying it in the context of an astronomical theory, it seems more likely Le Verrier instead chose to introduce his idea with the intention of honouring and evoking the Roman myths, in accordance with the established naming conventions for planets in our solar system.

[65]See Braun (2005), which elaborates on Braun (1993), which in turn was inspired by a suggestion from Kaplan (1989a). For competing accounts of the nature of the gappy proposition encoded and expressed, see, for example, Spencer (2023) and Caplan et al. (2023).

their theory do not exist. We think an attractive explanation of *why* they failed is *because* the posits of their theory do not exist. Ecumenical Realism distorts these important differences between fiction and mistaken theorizing, even if Cowling and Cray's (2022) "Story Idealism" is correct, and Cray and Schroeder's (2015) "Theory Idealism" is correct, and both stories and theories consist of ideas. Even then, the differences between fictional storytelling and mistaken theorizing prevent even *the very same idea* from playing the same role in storytelling and again in theorizing.

Reaching back to our initial examples, Roddenberry succeeded in creating a fictional planet (which, of course, is not a planet), while Le Verrier failed to discover an intra-Mercurial planet (as there is no such planet to be discovered), and nothing that resulted from the activities of either can be traced back to a Roman god (as Roman gods, much like intra-Mercurial planets, simply fail to exist). Or, to sum up more confusingly, Vulcan exists, while Vulcan and Vulcan do not.

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