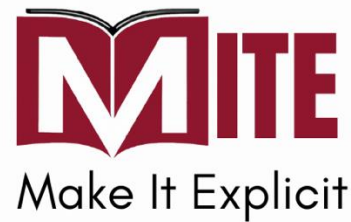


Fiction, Identity, and Existence: A Study in Experimental Philosophy

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- Number of **participants**: 186.
- Online questionnaire administration through **LimeSurvey**.
- **Linear Mixed Model**: kind of analysis that allows to take into account the fact that it is the same persons answering different questions.
- **Period**: from mid-April to mid-August 2025.

Section A – The Identity of *Ficta*

Interfictional Identity 1 (different versions of the same story)
Interfictional Identity 2 (similar characterizations in different stories)
Interfictional Identity 3 (different characterizations in different stories)
Interfictional Identity 4 (deviant characterizations in different stories)
Interfictional Identity 5 (indiscernibility in causally unrelated stories)

Renzo Tramaglino and Fermo Spolino
Berget/Vington and Vinteuil
Queen of Hearts and Ugly Duchess

Harry Potter in PS and in CS
Ulysses in *Iliad* and in *Odyssey*
Holmes in SS and in HB

Harry Potter in DH and in F1
Ulysses in Homer and in Dante
Holmes in SS and in *Sherlock*

Harry Potter in PS and in F2
Ulysses and Leopold Bloom
Holmes in SS and in WC

Ménard Case
Monkey Case
Amnesia Case

Section A – The Identity of *Ficta*

Intrafictional Identity 1 (different characterizations in the same story)	Donald Duck and Super-Duck Jekyll and Hyde Orlando (Woolf)
Intrafictional Identity 2 (inconsistent characterization)	Wanna and Wanda
Intrafictional Identity 3 (type-A indeterminate characterization)	Lucas and Claus
Intrafictional Identity 4 (type-B indeterminate characterization)	Kumiko and the Woman
Intrafictional Identity 5 (indiscernibility)	The orcs' army The couple of twins Rumpelmayer's men

Section A – The Identity of *Ficta*

Failure of Symmetry
Migration (from reality to fiction)
Authorial Essentialism

E.g.: the protagonist of Joyce's novel is the character created by Homer, but not *vice versa*.

Napoleon in WP
Hadrian in MA
Walter Siti in TP

Elena Greco (Ferrante/Morante)
Clarissa Dalloway (Woolf/Joyce)
Philip Marlowe (Chandler/Others)

Interfictional Identity 5 – Ménard Case

In a short story from J. L. Borges' *Ficciones*, Pierre Ménard, a French writer at the beginning of the XX century, rewrites Cervantes' *Don Quixote* using exactly the same words. Let us suppose that Ménard knew nothing about Cervantes or his characters and, *by pure chance*, happened to write a literary work indistinguishable from Cervantes' novel.

Question 4_B – Ménard's Quixote and Cervantes' Quixote are the same character. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

- 1 - Not at all.
- 2 - Little.
- 3 - Averagely.
- 4 - Very much.
- 5 - Completely.

Section B – The Existence of *Ficta*

“So far, we have been comparing fictional characters with each other while trying to identify or distinguish them. Still, someone may object that things like Donald Duck, Clarissa Dalloway and Harry Potter are just not real.

Imagine that you want to make a list comprising everything that inhabits reality and consider the following ideas. Remember that there are no right or wrong answers: we are just asking you to read carefully and indicate which ideas sound more plausible to you.”

T1 – Fictionalism

The character of Harry Potter is not in the list of all real things. When we say, for instance, that J. K. Rowling created an extremely popular literary character, we do not really intend to assert it: we are just *pretending* to assert it, like when we tell a fairy tale to children.

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

- 1 - Not at all.
- 2 - Little.
- 3 - Averagely.
- 4 - Very much.
- 5 - Completely.

T2 – Platonism

The character of Harry Potter is in the list of all real things. Even though fictional characters do not exist concretely in space and time, like you and I do, they exist abstractly like numbers and mathematical theorems: actually, J. K.

Rowling did not create Harry Potter, she *discovered* him/it (in the same way in which a mathematician discovers the proof of a theorem).

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

1 - Not at all.

2 - Little.

3 - Averagely.

4 - Very much.

5 - Completely.

T3 – Creationism

The character of Harry Potter is in the list of all real things. Indeed, the character of Harry Potter was literally created by J. K. Rowling at a certain point in time: thus, even though fictional characters do not exist in *space* (like you and I do), they do exist in *time*.

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

- 1 - Not at all.
- 2 - Little.
- 3 - Averagely.
- 4 - Very much.
- 5 - Completely.

T4 – Meinongianism

The character of Harry Potter is in the list of all real things. Harry Potter is a human being (although magical) just like you and me: the difference is that we have the property of existence while he/it does not. Indeed, reality is inhabited both by things that do exist, such as you and me, and by things that do not exist, such as Harry Potter.

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

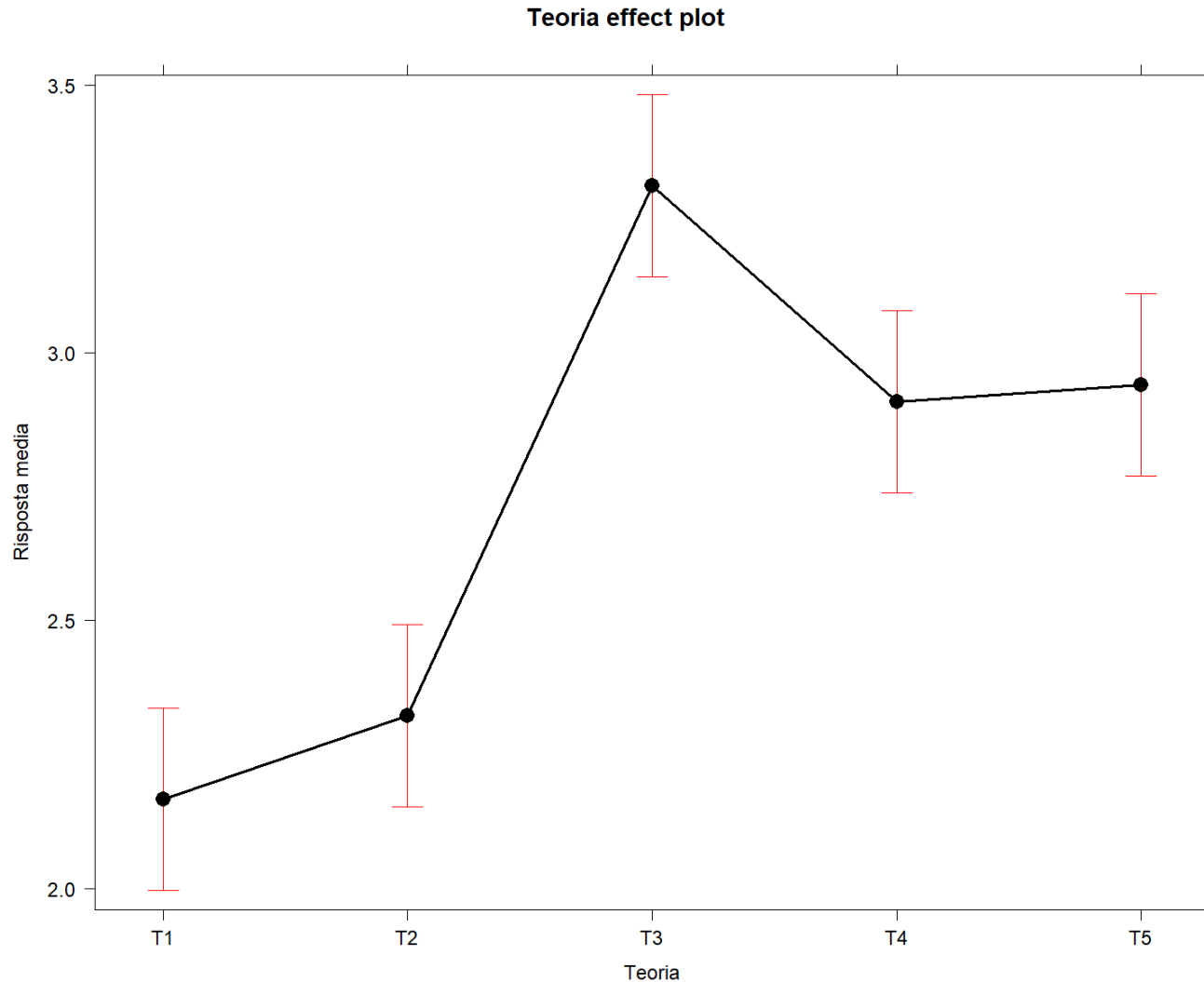
- 1 - Not at all.
- 2 - Little.
- 3 - Averagely.
- 4 - Very much.
- 5 - Completely.

T5 – Concretism

In the list of all real things there is not the character of Harry Potter but only his/its *concrete* representations, located in space and time (for instance, the single copies of the films featuring him/it, the single copies of Rowling's novels, the single images of Harry Potter in my mind or in yours, and so on).

To what extent do you agree with this idea?

- 1 - Not at all.
- 2 - Little.
- 3 - Averagely.
- 4 - Very much.
- 5 - Completely.

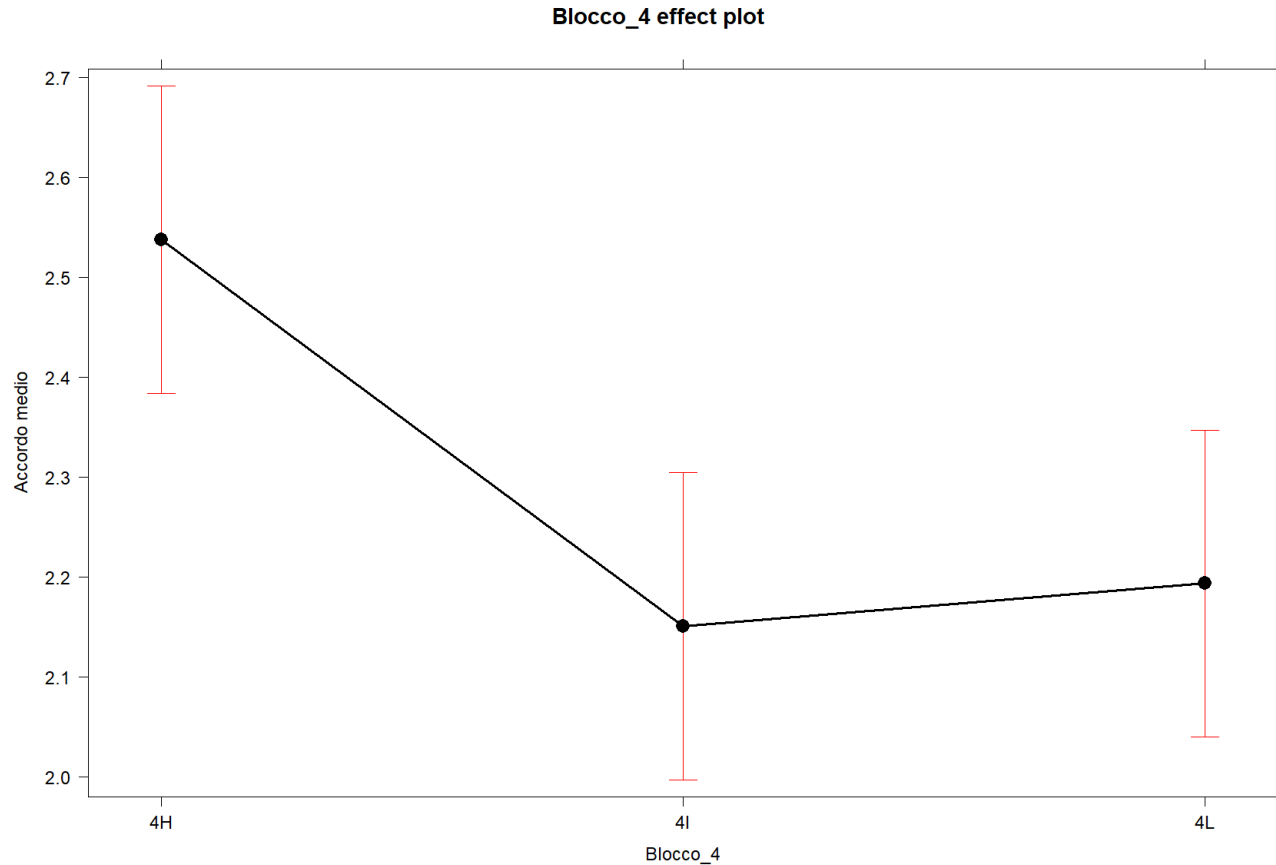


contrast	estimate	SE	df	t.ratio	p.value
T1 - T2	-0.1198	0.123	736	-0.974	1.0000
T1 - T3	-1.0582	0.123	736	-8.597	<.0001
T1 - T4	-0.6592	0.123	736	-5.356	<.0001
T1 - T5	-0.7303	0.123	736	-5.934	<.0001
T2 - T3	-0.9383	0.123	736	-7.624	<.0001
T2 - T4	-0.5394	0.123	736	-4.383	0.0001
T2 - T5	-0.6105	0.123	736	-4.960	<.0001
T3 - T4	0.3989	0.123	736	3.241	0.0124
T3 - T5	0.3278	0.123	736	2.664	0.0790
T4 - T5	-0.0711	0.123	736	-0.577	1.0000

The difference between Fictionalism (T1) and Platonism (T2) is negligible, as well as the one between Meinongianism (T4) and Concretism (T5). **Creationism (T3)** gathers more consensus than the others.

N.B.: the difference between T3 e T5 is very close to 0,05; it can be said that *Creationism tends to overcome Concretism* (a larger sample is expected to confirm the tendency).

Interfictional Identity 1 (different versions of the same story)



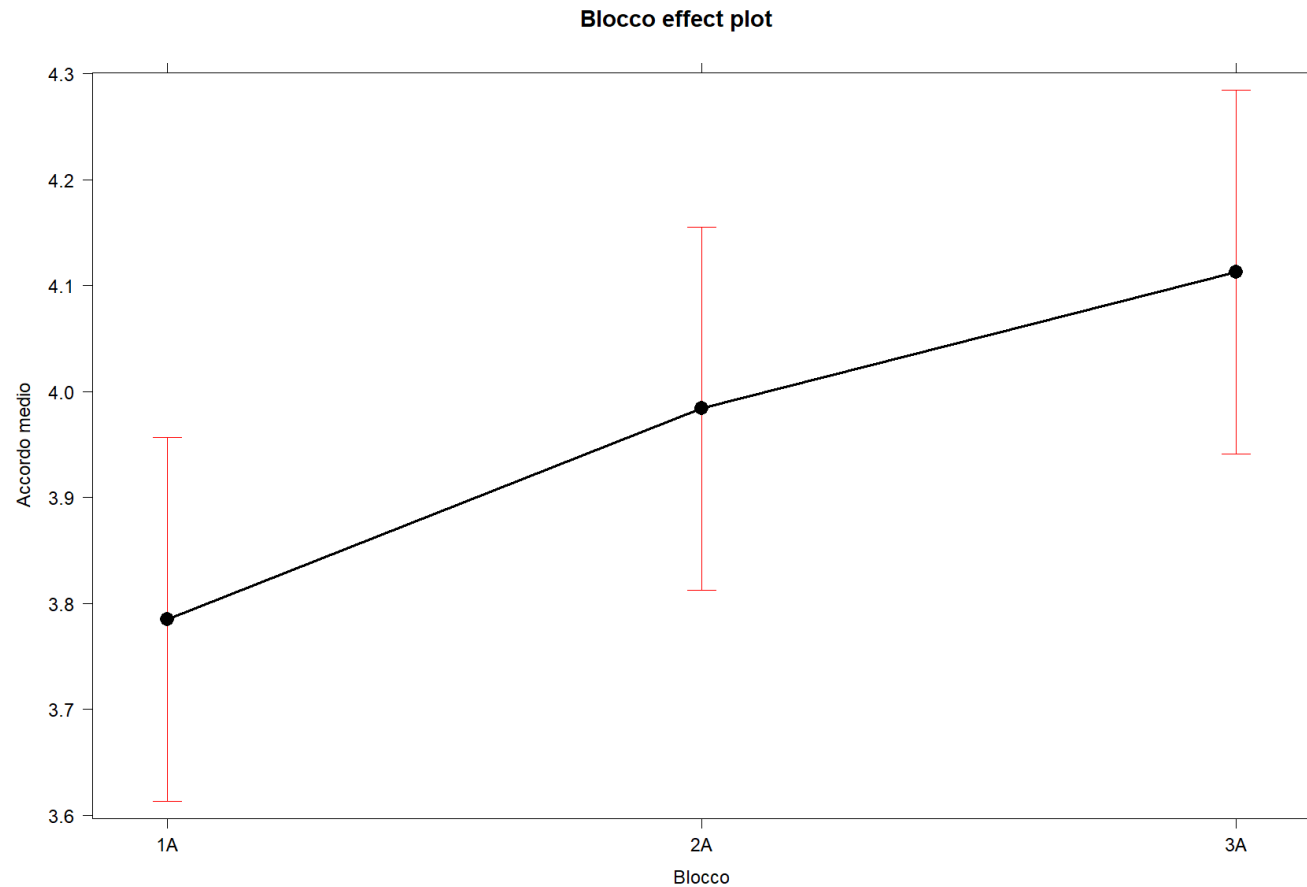
Renzo T. \neq Fermo S.

Berget \neq Vinteuil

Queen of Hearts-1 \neq Ugly Duchess

Hypothesis: there is no statistically significant difference between cases 2 and 3 because they are specular cases of (respectively) **fusion** and **fission**, while 1 just involves one character in a version of a story and one ch. in a subsequent version.

Interfictional Identity 2 (similar characterizations in different stories)



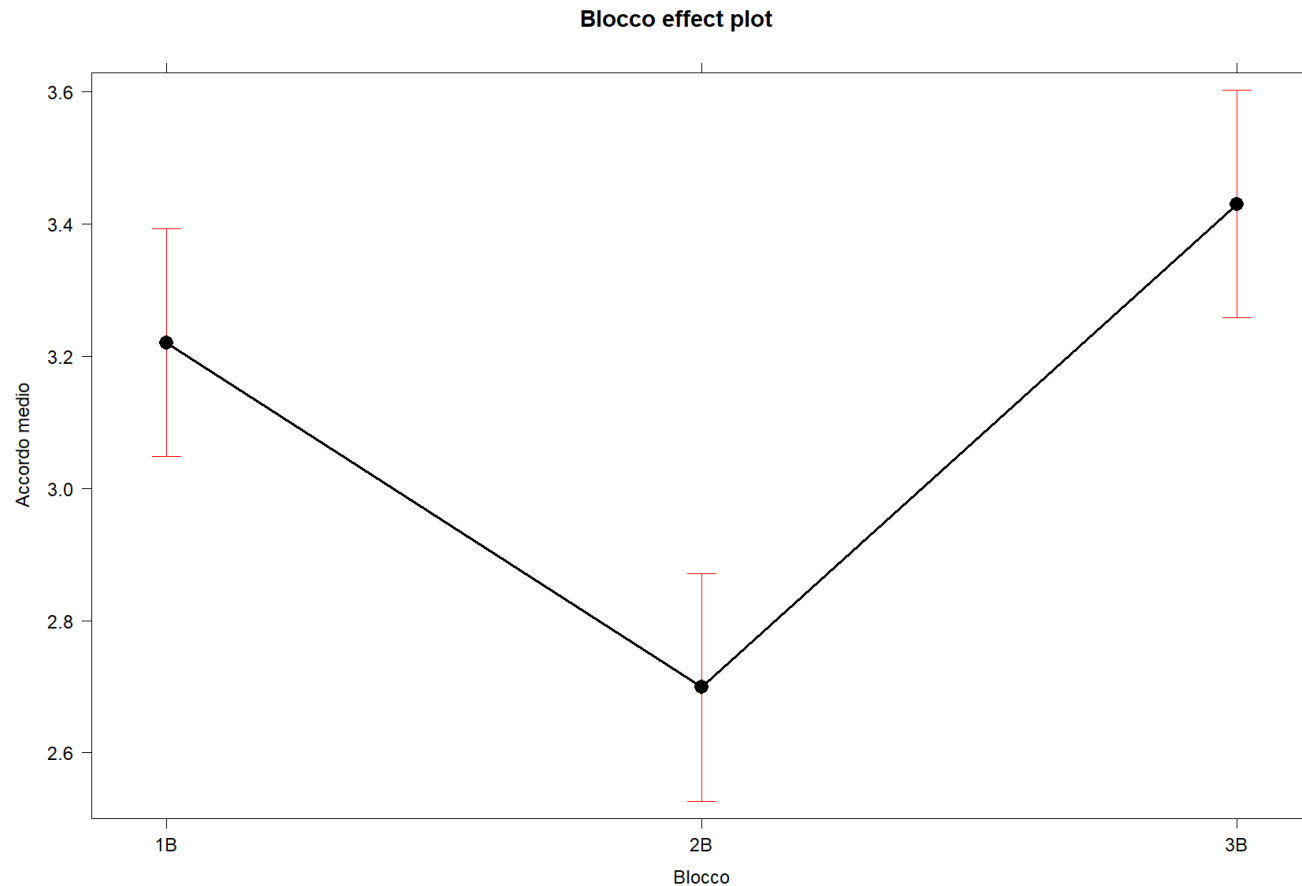
Iliad's Ulysses = Odyssey's Ulysses

SS's Holmes = HB's Holmes

PS's Harry Potter = CS's Harry Potter

Just as expected.

Interfictional Identity 3 (different characterizations in different stories)



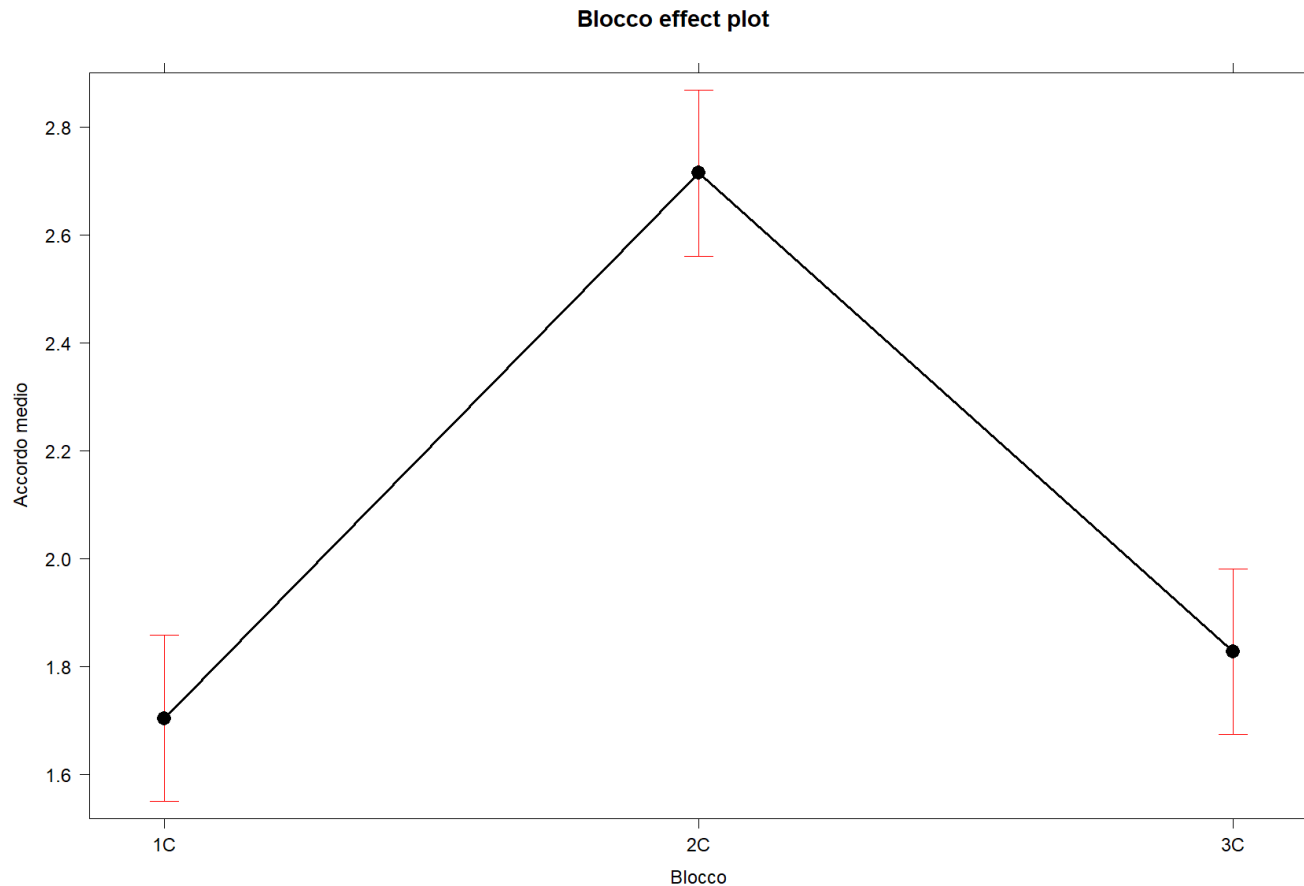
Homer's Ulysses = Dante's Ulysses

Doyle's Holmes \neq TV's Holmes

Rowling's HP = F1's HP

Comments: in 1 and 3, the main change concerns the ending; in 2, it concerns the setting. It is difficult (maybe impossible) to identify a threshold beyond which a change in characterization determines a numerical change of character as well.

Interfictional Identity 4 (deviant characterizations in different stories)



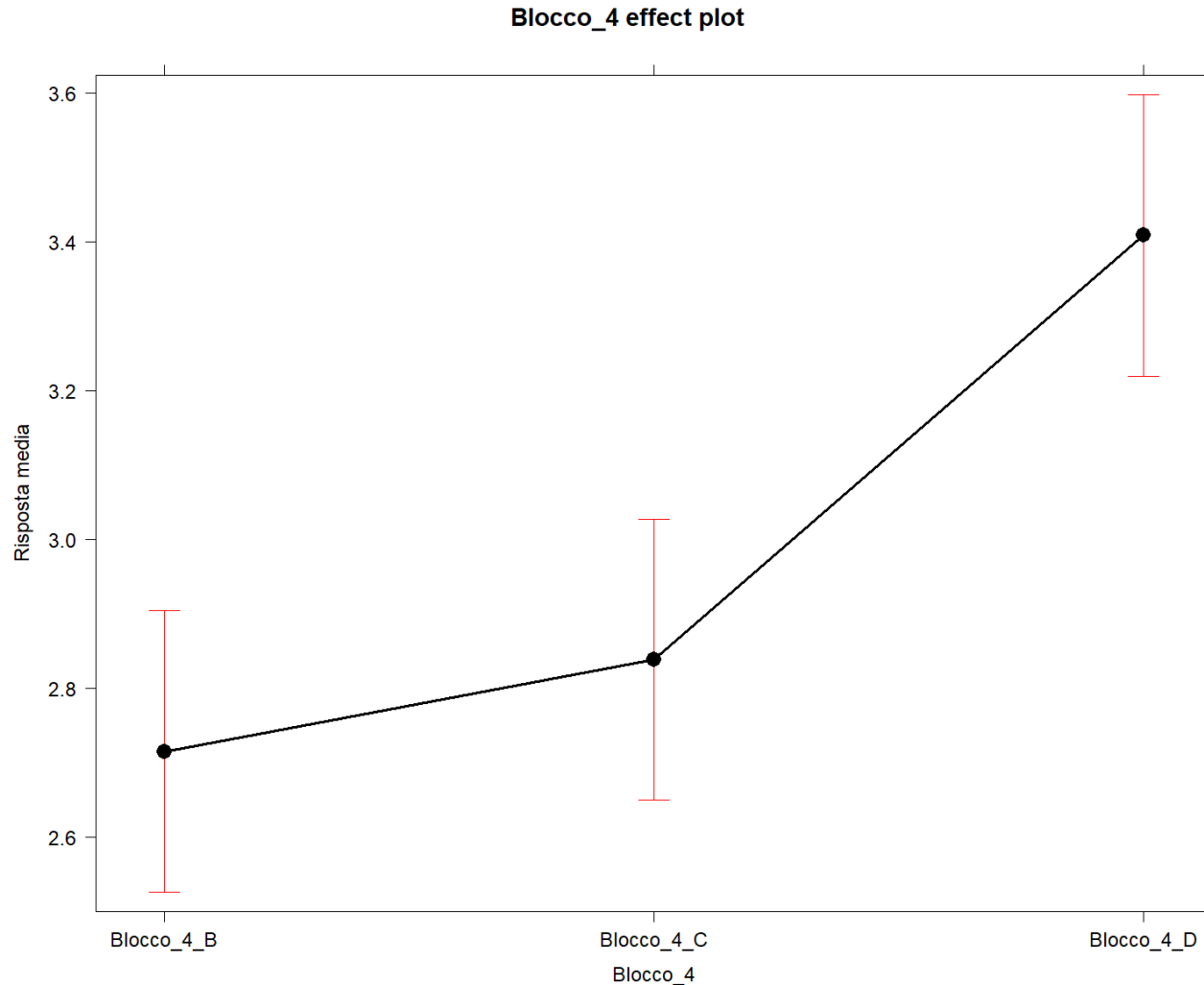
Homer's Ulysses \neq Leopold Bloom

Doyle's Holmes \neq WC's Holmes

Rowling's HP \neq F2's HP

Partly as expected, but in case 2 the tendency towards distinction is less strong. **Hypothesis:** the fact that Without a Clue is a parody might have played a role (one may entertain the intuition that, in order for a parody to be effective, it must be about *that very same* character).

Interfictional Identity 5 (indiscernibility in causally unrelated stories)



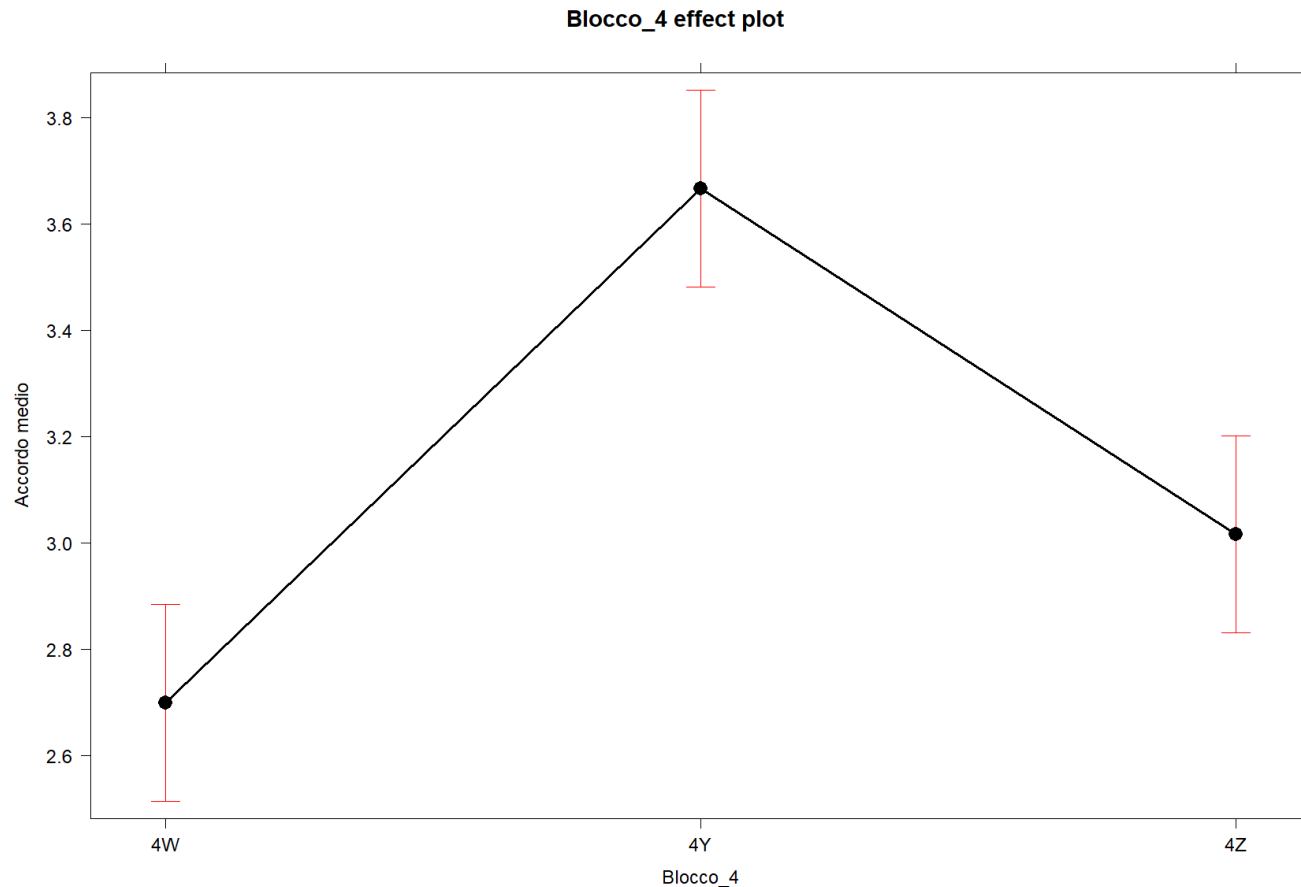
Cervantes' DC \neq Ménard's DC

Woolf's MD \neq Monkey's MD

1-Woolf's MD = 2-Woolf's MD

Hypothesis: case 3 has been perceived as different from 1 and 2 either because (i) it may be presumed a causal link in case 3 or (ii) it may be presumed that the same author wrote both stories (highly controversial).

Intrafictional Identity 1 (different characterizations in the same story)



Donald Duck \neq Super-Duck ?

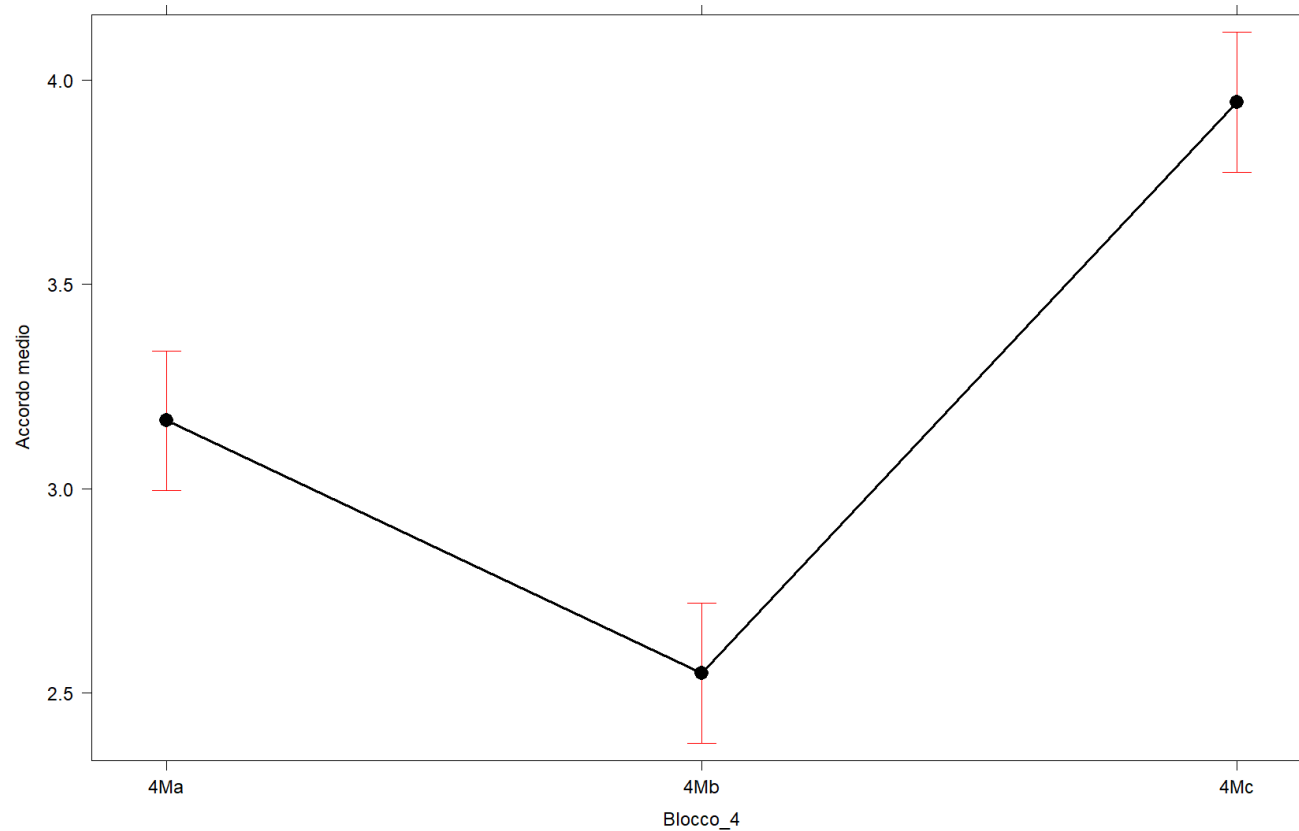
Woolf's Orlando is one and the same.

Dr. Jekyll \neq Mr. Hyde ?

In these cases, there seems to be too much **uncertainty**: either data are not sufficient or intuitions are blurry. However, tendency towards the identification of Orlando as a single character is quite stronger.

Intrafictional Identity 2 (inconsistent characterization)

Blocco_4 effect plot



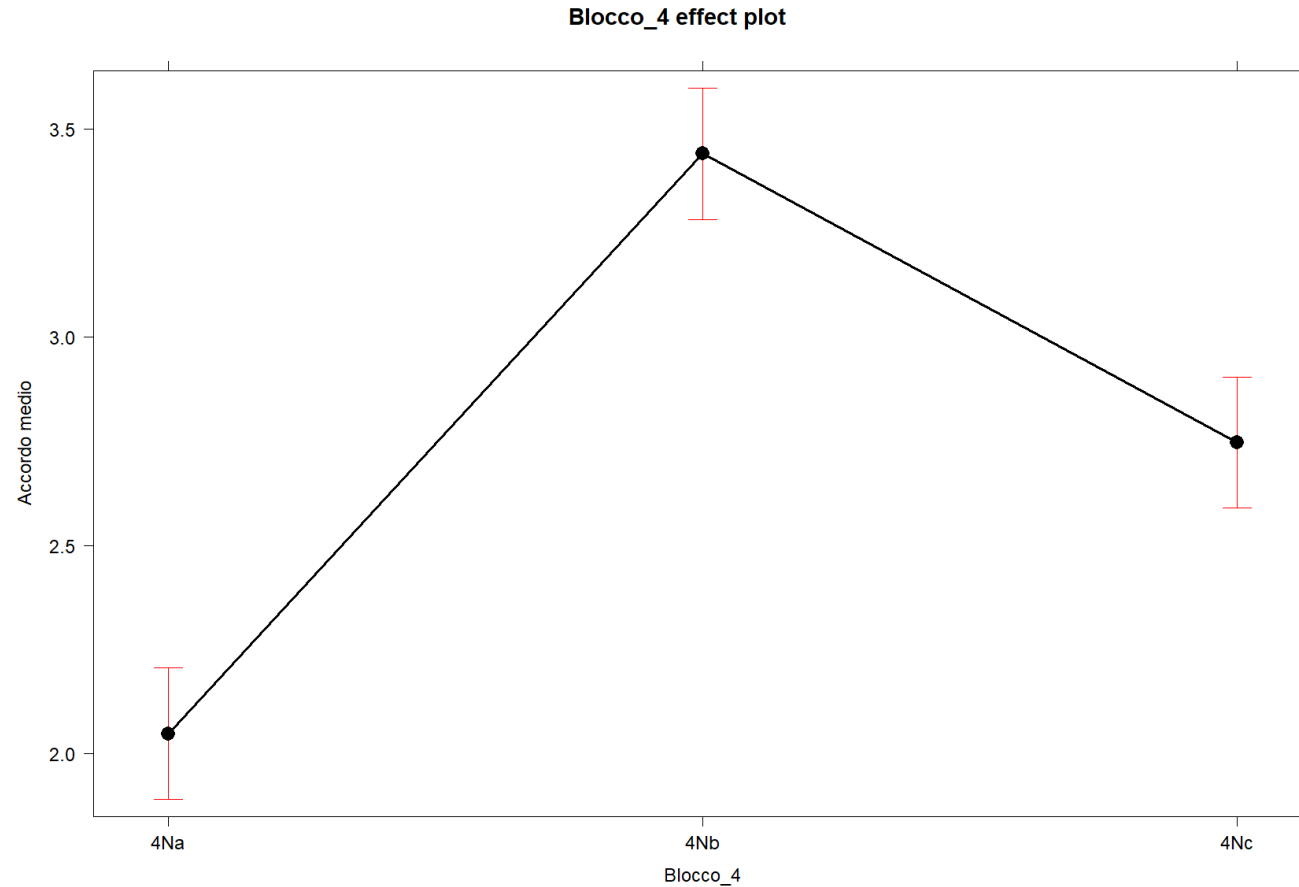
Wanna \neq Wanda 3,2 ca.

Wanna = Wanda 2,6 ca.

Wn = Wd & Wn \neq Wd 3,9 ca.

There seems to be a certain consensus around the intuition that inconsistent identity within fiction **projects** onto reality.

Intrafictional Identity 3 (type-A indeterminate characterization)



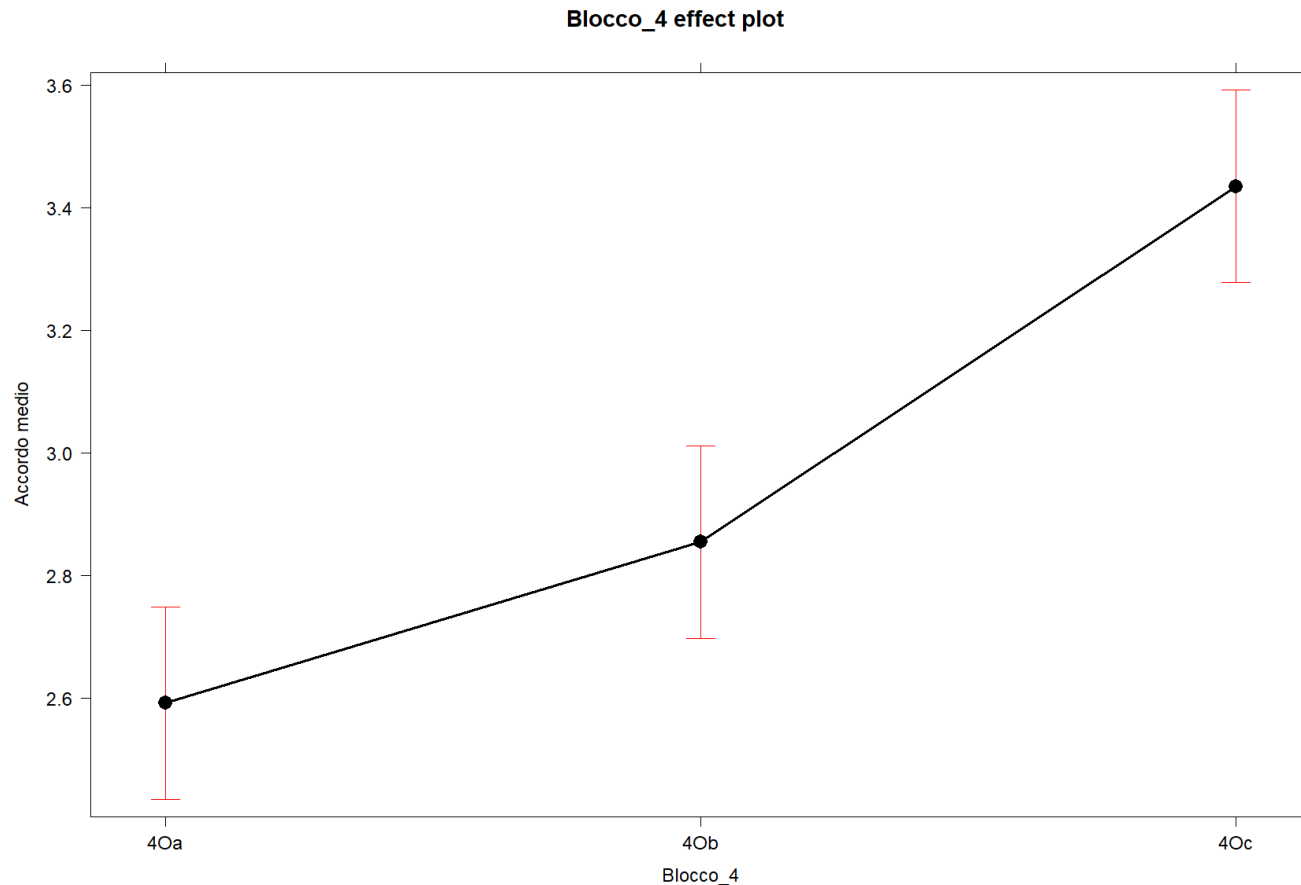
Lucas = Claus 2,1 ca.

Lucas \neq Claus 3,4 ca.

∇ (Lucas = Claus) 2,7 ca.

There seems to be a tendency towards distinction. Also, type-A indeterminacy tends *not* to be projected onto reality.

Intrafictional Identity 4 (type-B indeterminate characterization)



Kumiko = the Woman 2,6 ca.

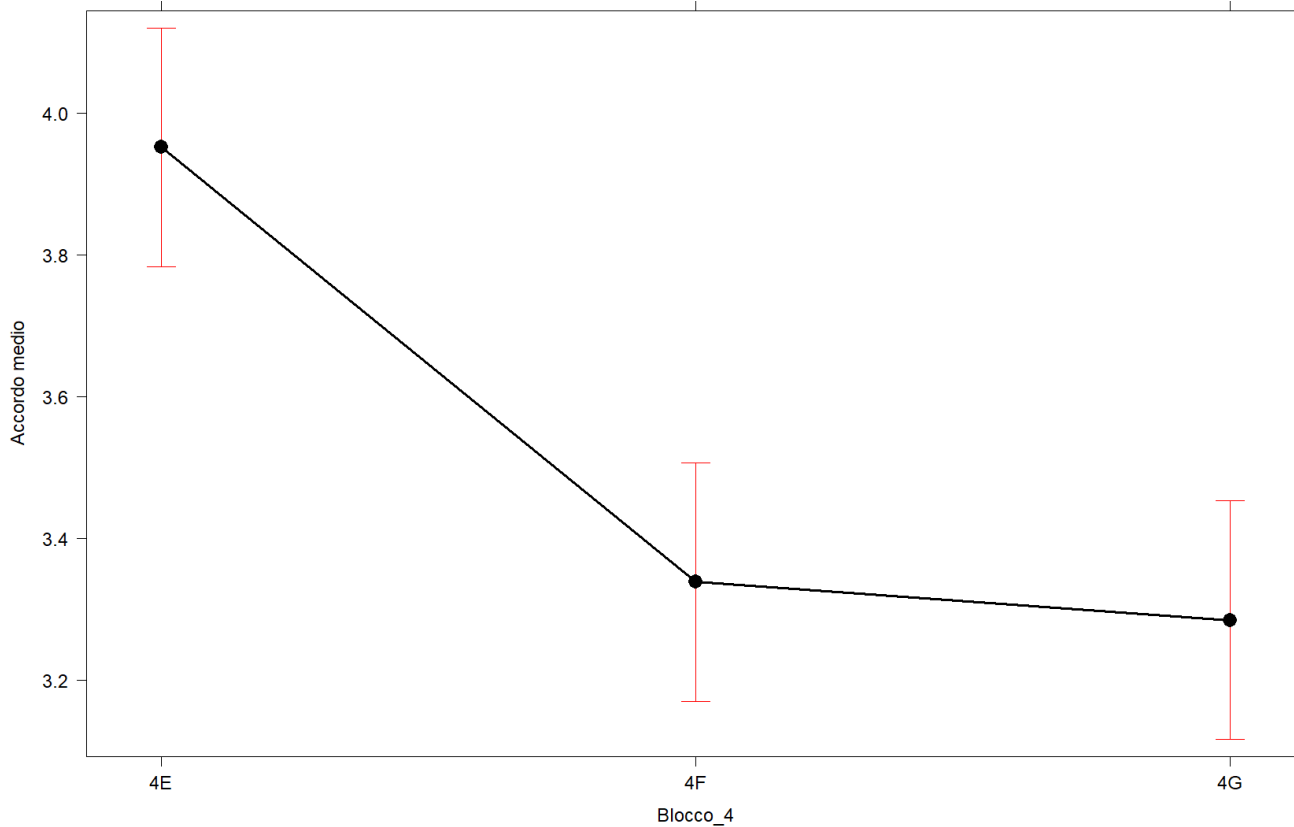
Kumiko \neq the Woman 2,8 ca.

∇ (Kumiko = the Woman) 3,4 ca.

Contrary to type-A indeterminacy, type-B indeterminacy tends to be projected onto reality.

Intrafictional Identity 5 (indiscernibility)

Blocco_4 effect plot

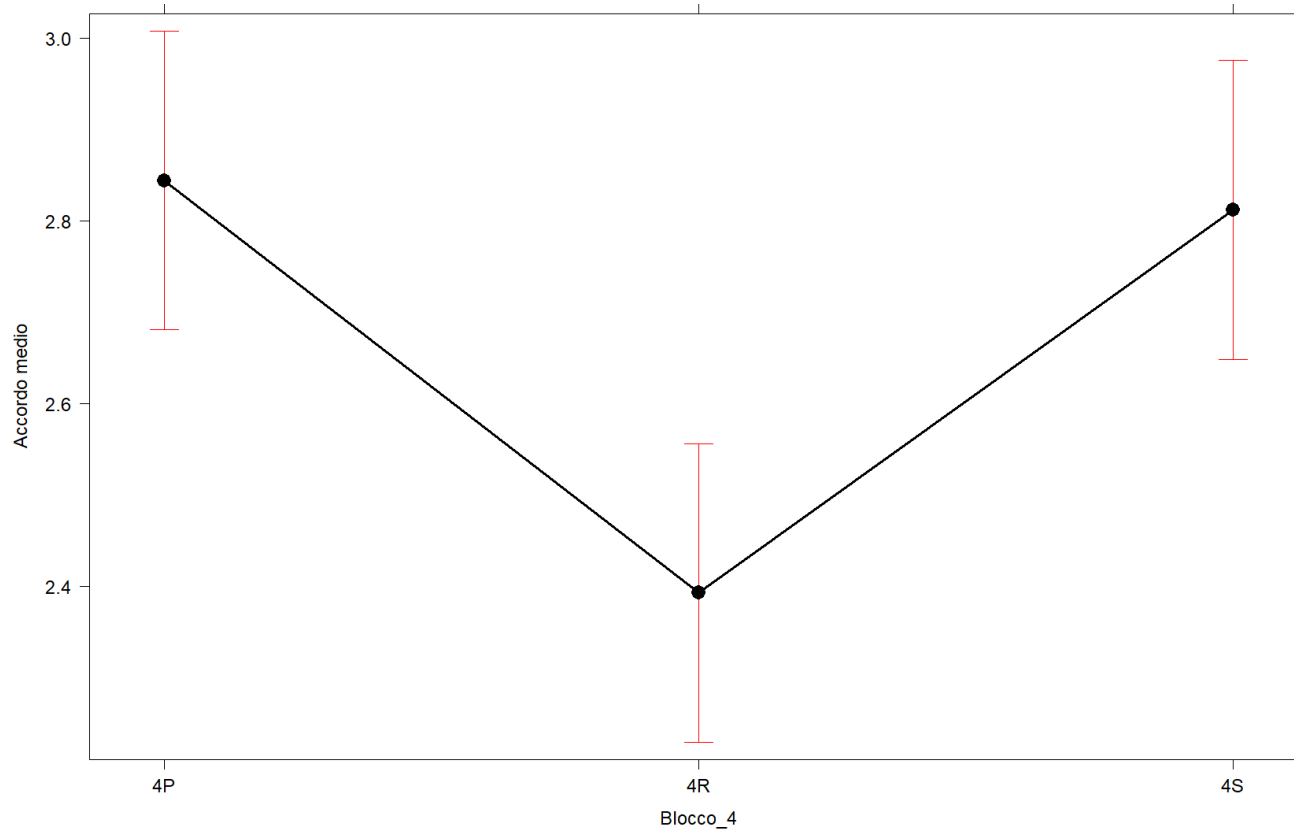


In each case, there is just **one plural character**: the orcs' army, the couple of twins, Rumpelmayer's men.

Tendency towards the identification of Tolkien's orcs as a single collective character is stronger.

Migration

Blocco_4 effect plot



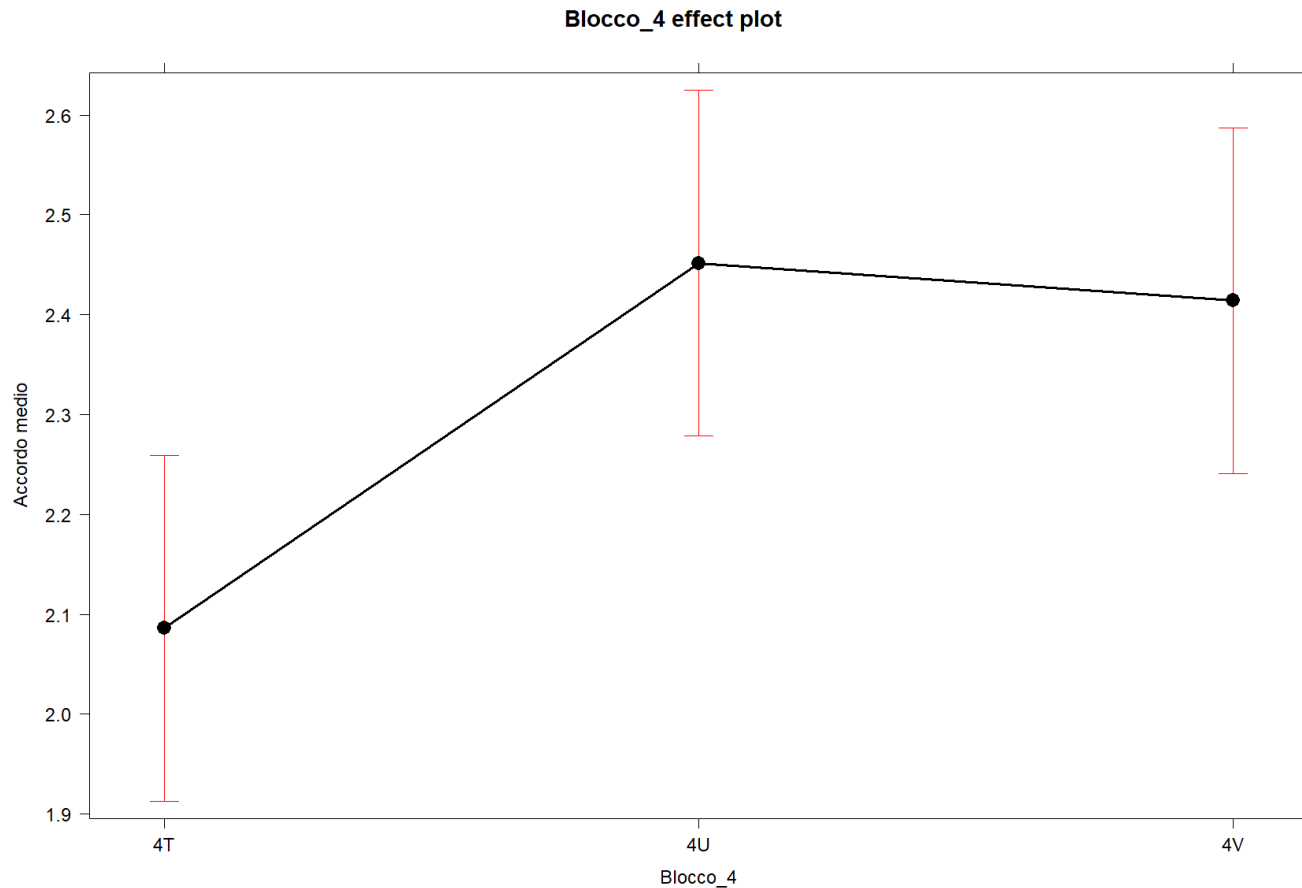
Napoleon \neq Tolstoj's Napoleon

Siti \neq TP's Siti

Hadrian \neq Yourcenar's Hadrian

In Siti's case (autofiction) there is a stronger tendency to distinction. It would be interesting to check if there is a difference in response between **literary scholars** and laypeople.

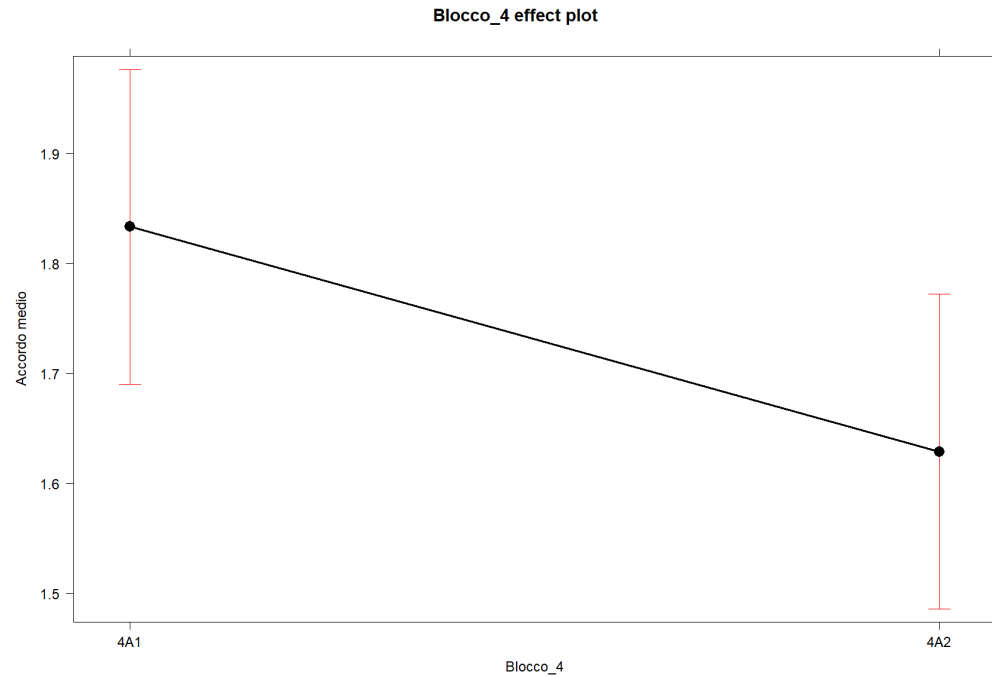
Author Essentialism



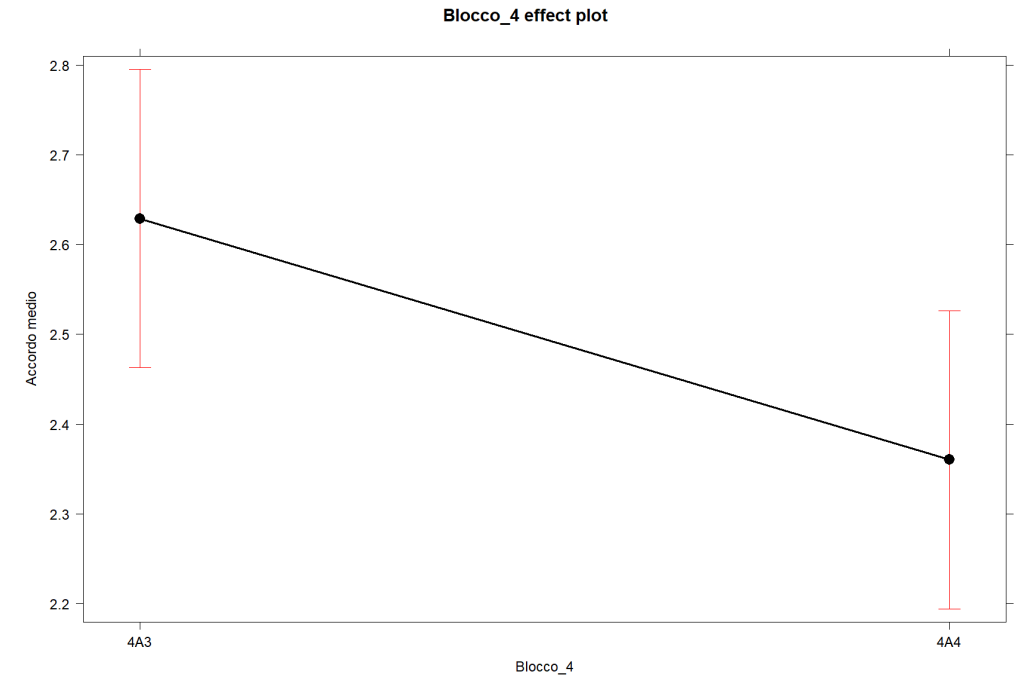
In each case, the character's identity seems to depend **essentially** on the identity of the author: Elena Greco would not have been the same character, had Elsa Morante (instead of Elena Ferrante) created her/it.

This result reinforces hypothesis (ii) in the case of Woolf losing her memories and rewriting *Mrs. Dalloway* again.

Failure of Symmetry



Leopold Bloom is the character created by Homer.
Ulysses is the character created by Joyce.



WC's protagonist is the character created by Doyle.
Doyle's Holmes is the character that features in WC.

No substantive failure of symmetry detected.