JOHN DILWORTH

The Fictionality of Plays

The category of works of fiction is a very broad and heterogeneous one. I do have a general thesis in mind about such works, namely, that they themselves are fictional, in much the same way as are the fictional events or entities that they are about. But a defense of such a broad thesis would provide an intractably complex topic for an introductory essay, so I shall here confine myself to a presentation of a similar thesis for *narrative theatrical works* or plays, performances of which are naturally regarded as involving, or evoking, a "fictional world" whose fictional characters and events are what the work in question is about. Another reason for initially focusing on such narrative plays is because performances of them provide a rich source of epistemic issues about evidence for artistic authenticity or correctness of artworks, which will turn out to be of integral importance to my fictionalist account of plays.[1]

To begin, then, Hamlet is one of the fictional characters in the play *Hamlet* by Shakespeare, which also includes, in some way, various other fictional characters and events. Now presumably, to say that Hamlet is a fictional character is to say, among other things, that he is not a real person, but merely an imagined character, and, hence, that Hamlet himself does not actually exist—and so on for the other fictional characters and events in the play, or in general for the "content" of the play. But what is the relation between those characters and events and the play *Hamlet* itself?

As a preamble to answering that question, consider (what could be called) the "world" of the play. On one natural construal the characters and events of the play make up a *fictional world*, which includes all of the contents (the characters and events, etc.) associated with the play.[2] As to

the world itself, it is also fictional, because it is entirely made up of such fictional contents.

The initial question, as to the relation between the play *Hamlet* and its characters and events, can now be supplemented by an additional question about the relation between the play *Hamlet* and the fictional world of "Hamlet." My answer to the question will be that we should identify the play *Hamlet* with the "Hamlet" fictional world, and thus regard the *play Hamlet* and the *fictional world* "Hamlet" as being indistinguishable.[3]

An answer to the initial question, concerning the relation between the characters and events of the play *Hamlet* and the play itself is now available, namely, that the play, since it is a fictional world, is constituted by, or made up of, those characters and events, so that the play itself is fictional, just as are its constituents.

However, this initial account of a fictional world is somewhat oversimplified, because of course a fictional world is not an actual or *real* world, for which it could *actually* be true that it is constituted by or made up of its constituents such as people and events. An important symptom of this difference is the fact that we also want to say that the "Hamlet" world, as identified with the play *Hamlet*, is *about* its events and characters, so that such a fictional world can also be described as having a certain dramatic structure involving its characters and events in complex ways, as being a suitable subject for critical literary discussion, and so on. And indeed a similar point applies to the characters and events that the fictional world is about: they too may be viewed as topics for critical discussion or argument. This dual nature of fictional worlds, and of their characters and events, is connected with the common distinction between

"external" and "internal" views of the characters and events of a play, as discussed in Sections 3, 5, and 7.

To continue, establishing the thesis that a play such as *Hamlet* is to be identified with its corresponding fictional world—and, hence, that the play itself is fictional—requires some substantive argument, including dealing with various alternative views and various kinds of objections to it. To this task I now turn. To simplify the discussion I shall describe my thesis as that of the *fictionality* of plays.

I. PLAYS AND REPRESENTATIONS

So far the discussion has traded on certain commonplaces, such as that everyone knows that the character Hamlet in Shakespeare's play is not a real person, but merely a fictional character, and, hence, that Hamlet himself does not actually exist. And similarly for the other characters in the play, the actions they perform, and so on—everyone knows that these are merely fictional, and that none of them actually exist, so that the play *Hamlet*, insofar as it is viewed as being entirely made up of or constituted by those characters and events, also is fictional or nonexistent.

But there is also an opposing commonplace or intuition to be considered with respect to the play *Hamlet*, namely, that some real person (generally assumed to be Shakespeare) did actually write it. Also, the work in question has an unbroken performance tradition in hundreds of theatre companies from the day of its first performance until now. Thus its status as a real, unquestionably existing cultural entity might seem as secure as anything could be.[4]

Given these two kinds of facts about *Hamlet*—the undeniable fictionality of the characters and events making up its fictional world versus the equally undeniable reality of the play as a cultural institution—it is usually assumed that together they provide adequate, or even conclusive, grounds for *denying* that the play could be identified with its corresponding fictional world.

However, I shall provide a strategy by means of which the undeniably existing cultural institutions and entities associated with the play *Hamlet*—including copies and performances thereof—may be distinguished from the play itself, so that their existence no longer counts against the thesis that the play *Hamlet* is fictional.

My strategy will be to argue that the copies and performances of *Hamlet* in question are in actuality *representations* of the play, rather than themselves *being* the play, or being tokens or instances of it. Thus, for instance, on my view, a printed copy of the play *Hamlet represents* the play, which is to say that it represents the fictional "Hamlet" world that, on my view, constitutes the play *Hamlet* itself.[5] Thus the printed copy is not itself the play *Hamlet*, nor a token or instance of it, but instead it functions as a *textual representation* of the play. And similarly, on my view, any performance of "Hamlet" also represents the play, but in a different representational mode, appropriate to its status as a performance rather than as a printed copy of the play.[6]

II. COMPARISONS WITH WALTON'S VIEW

Since both my thesis that plays are fictional and my strategy of defending it—via identifying any nonfictional, actual items or artifacts associated with a play as being representations of it—are unusual, it may be helpful at this stage to compare and contrast my view with the well-known view of Kendall Walton, as expressed in his book *Mimesis as Make-Believe*.[7] According to Walton, works of art are props in games of make-believe, and a prop is a representation that generates various propositions, which together constitute a fictional world associated with the prop.[8]

The main point of similarity between our views is the idea that in artwork cases a representation can be associated with a fictional world,[9] which is in some sense generated by the representation.

However, on my view, a fictional world is, in the case of fiction and plays, *made up of* the characters and events described in a representation of it—such as a printed copy of the play—rather than, as in Walton's account, its being a set of fictional propositions. But it should be noted that this account of Walton's is his "considered" view rather than his initial one, on which a proposition was said to be fictional just in case it was "true in a fictional world" (Section 1.9). Thus, my account of fictional worlds is similar to that of his initial intuitions (and common ways of speaking), rather than to his more

developed view. My view is the intuitively natural one that such a set of propositions *describes* rather than *constitutes* a fictional world.

Nevertheless, my view need involve no greater degree of ontological commitment to fictional worlds or entities than does Walton's view. Such worlds of course are not real and do not actually exist, but, notwithstanding that, a theory such as mine that explains references to plays as being references to fictional worlds could still be theoretically defensible—and possibly preferable to other accounts—even if at some deeper level of analysis all references to fictional entities or worlds were to be explained away.[10] (I shall take no stand here on the possibility of thus explaining away such references.)

Now it might be thought that Walton's view that it is specifically *imaginings* of a fictional world that are generated by representations should make a difference in this discussion. However, on my view, the specific mental or cognitive attitude entertained toward a fictional world—whether it be imagined, conceived, thought about, supposed or posited, questioned, emotionally reacted to, and so on—is not relevant to the issues at hand. I think that discussions of plays themselves should center on issues concerning representations and fictional worlds, rather than on the very miscellaneous possible mental attitudes we might have toward such items in various contexts.

Next I shall compare our views with respect to plays such as *Hamlet*. For the purposes of this discussion, I shall ignore our differing interpretations of fictional worlds, concentrating instead on their relations to representations. A critical passage showing Walton's view of plays is as follows:

Is it *Gulliver's Travels* and *Macbeth* themselves that are props, or just *copies* of the novel and *performances* of the play? What the reader or spectator is to imagine depends on the nature of the work itself, the novel or play; copies or performances serve to indicate what its nature is. So the work is a prop. In the case of *Macbeth* peculiarities of a particular performance—costumes, gestures, inflections—enjoin imaginings in addition to those prescribed by the work, so the performance is a prop also.[11]

Encapsulated in this paragraph is a clause that succinctly describes my view: "copies or performances serve to indicate what its [the work] nature is," in that on my view such copies or performances indicate or represent the fictional world that (on my account) constitutes (the nature of) the artwork in question.

However, Walton is clearly *not* intending to use the term "indicate" in this passage in a representational sense that implies that copies or performances are thereby props; indeed, on his account performances only count as props because of the additional work that they do in enjoining "imaginings in addition to those prescribed by the work."

Thus, Walton is forced to use some such term as "indicate" to describe the relation of copies or performances to works, but it remains unclear why the term "indicate" is not representational in his sense and why copies in particular are not props on his view. Also, if he regards a play itself as being a prop, then his account of props has moved far from his paradigm cases of representational props such as tree-stumps and rocking horses, which are concrete particulars. It is an advantage of my account that, according to it, works themselves are not props or representations, but instead they are *represented by* the concrete copies or performances that are indeed representations or props in a normal, everyday sense.

However, in spite of these differences, I agree with Walton's basic point[12] as expressed in the first part of his sentence, "What the reader or spectator is to imagine depends on the nature of the work itself, the novel or play; copies or performances serve to indicate what its nature is," and, hence, I agree with the whole of his sentence when "indicate" is reinterpreted, as above, as itself being a representational concept.

Nonetheless, there is an important issue on which Walton is silent with respect to the *prescriptivity* of works. This issue involves a distinction between epistemic versus broadly ontological or factual issues concerning a work. Although I agree that it is the work itself, or facts about it, that has (or have) prescriptive force,[13] nevertheless there are epistemic issues concerning *authoritative sources of information* about such a work that also need to be considered, which can only adequately be accounted for by invoking facts about certain representations of a work. Thus, on my view, the only source of *evidence* we have for what constitutes

a play such as *Hamlet* is provided by items such as the printed copies and performances thereof that *represent* the work, so that a Walton-style account of what a play prescribes must be fleshed out with an account of the *representational conditions under which we have adequate grounds for claiming* that a work is a certain way or that it prescribes certain descriptions of it.[14]

A prime issue concerning such representational conditions is that of when they do, or do not, count as being *authoritative* as sources of information concerning the work in question. Certain representations have a privileged status as sources of information for accurately assessing the content of a work, namely, those I have elsewhere called *originative* representations in the case of music, literature, and theatre, or *original* representations in the case of the visual arts such as painting and sculpture.[15]

An *originative* representation is an item such as the original score of a musical composition by Beethoven, penned in his own hand, or the original typed or handwritten manuscript of a play or novel as produced by its author. As the name suggests, an originative representation usually originates or initiates a series of other representations of the same work, but only the originative representation is privileged, in that it alone is the direct causal outcome of the artist's successful creative efforts with respect to the artwork in question. Thus an originative representation typically provides the ultimate degree of epistemic authority in assessing the content of a fictional world, whereas nonoriginative representations typically[16] have only a derived authority, depending on their degree of fidelity in accurately copying an appropriate originative representation.

This distinction of originative from nonoriginative representations is significant because it shows that the actual issues of authority in the assessment of the content of a fictional world, and, hence, an assessment of what the work may legitimately be taken to prescribe, are issues to be settled by examining various representations of a work in their actual historical contexts relative to the inception of the work in (one or more) originative representations as produced by the artist in question. Thus, a Walton-style abstract appeal to that which is mandated by "*a work*" itself, conceived of as something that is independent of such historically situated representations, has by comparison little or no epistemic value.

Walton's account of performances as props, on which peculiarities of a particular performance—costumes, gestures, inflections—enjoin imaginings in addition to those prescribed by the work, is also suspect, in that the peculiarities of a particular performance have no obvious authority to mandate anything, for they might just amount to ad hoc representations, such as tree-stumps being imagined as bears,[17] which Walton denies are (strictly speaking) props. Here again, it is the authority of an actual performance history for a play that determines which peculiarities of a particular production of a work count as contributing to an authoritative or legitimate performance of the work, as opposed to mere eccentricities that in performance obscure rather than illuminate the work's fictional world. Thus, here too my account can potentially give a more plausible account than Walton's on the relations of performances to fictional worlds.

One further point not adequately brought out yet is as follows. For me it is artworks *identified as fictional worlds* that have prescriptive force,[18] whereas for Walton it is instead *representations*—which, on his view, are artworks— that have prescriptive force. Thus, with my distinction above between the epistemic authority of representations versus the prescriptivity of artworks in mind, I can criticize Walton for, in effect, conflating the *epistemic* authority of some representations with the quite different idea of the prescriptivity of artworks, which, on my view, holds not for *representations* but rather for the artworks *represented by* them.

III. PREMATURE THEORIZING, AND EXPLANATION OF FICTIONS

It is time to step back and take a wider view of the issues. I think my view, on which a play is constituted by the fictional world associated with representations of the play such as performances or copies, is intuitively the most natural one to take. However, I also have a diagnosis as to why this view seems not to have been previously defended in the literature. On one plausible diagnosis, it is a result of (what could be

called) *premature theorizing* about fictional worlds.

It will generally be agreed that references, or apparent references, to fictional entities or worlds are philosophically problematic. However, such problems concerning fiction are simply one particular case of much wider philosophical issues concerning the relations between ontology and semantics when references, or apparent references, to nonexistent entities are at issue. Thus, an account of the nature of fictional artworks such as plays should, on my view, be developed and argued for independently of any consideration of those general semantic and ontological issues, since those issues, and possible ways of resolving them, are generic issues that have no direct bearing on the specific nature of *fictional* entities and *fictional* reference, as opposed to other kinds of ontological or referential issues in other cases of reference to nonexistent things.

The "premature theorizing" I mentioned occurs when fiction is approached with some general solution in mind to those generic problems in such a way that one's whole account of the nature and structure of fiction is motivated primarily, or even exclusively, by a desire to make fiction conform to one's preferred solution to the generic problems. Or, to put the issue in another way, the intuitively natural or pretheoretical issues concerning the specific nature of fiction have a *surface structure* that should be respected and investigated in its own right, prior to any attempts to explain it, or explain it away, on more generic philosophical grounds. Premature theorizing occurs when that surface structure is brushed aside as irrelevant to the "real" philosophical issues.[19]

But what then is the surface structure of fiction? There is of course plenty of room for disagreement, including theoretical disagreement, about this; my point against premature theorizing was merely intended to forestall a takeover or swamping of specific intuitive or theoretical issues about fiction itself by generic ontological and referential theories.

On my view, a critical issue of surface theory is that of (what could be called) the explanatory *center of gravity* of issues concerning fiction, namely, What is it that accounts of fiction are primarily *about*? My view is that they are primarily about fictional characters and worlds,

and that all other issues about fiction should be seen as ancillary issues, which are to be related to and explained by that primary focus. This position is also a natural methodological corollary to my claim that plays are fictional. I shall defend this view via a discussion of a well-known issue, which is as follows.

There is in the literature a much-discussed distinction between "internal" versus "external" approaches to fictional characters. Internal approaches deal with the fictional world and characters themselves, while external approaches instead deal with characters insofar as they are discussed, evaluated, or compared with other characters or worlds by critics.[20] For example, "Hamlet is the Prince of Denmark" is about Hamlet considered as an internal character, while "Hamlet is one of the most discussed fictional characters" is about Hamlet considered externally.[21]

I have tried to state this distinction without prejudging whether considering a character internally or externally amounts to a consideration of two distinct entities or objects of reference. The majority of theorists have views that claim or presuppose that the two are distinct, or that one can be referred to but the other cannot—which comes to the same thing, in that such a view similarly denies that there is one entity that can be referred to in both internal and external ways.[22]

However, on my view, such theorists cannot be right, because their view violates an intuitive view of the surface structure of fiction, in which the character Hamlet in the play is the *same* character who is said actually not to exist and who literary critics compare and contrast with other fictional characters.[23] To repeat, perhaps all of such intuitively natural surface views might be explained away at some deeper level of analysis, but the identity of the fictional Hamlet with the character discussed by literary theorists is a central feature of the surface structure of fiction, which has to be respected by any theory of fiction as providing at least an initial or pretheoretical requirement of adequacy for such theories.

Given the requirement that internal and external views must be about the same entity, there are consequently two possible surface views concerning the "explanatory center of gravity" of fiction. In one of these, any internal refer-

ences to a fictional character would be explained by reference to external facts about the character,[24] while in the other—a "fictionalist" view such as mine—the order of explanation would be reversed, with external references being explained by reference to facts about an internal character. I shall now proceed to explain and defend the fictionalist approach. For the sake of brevity and convenience, I shall talk of fictional characters purely in surface terms, assuming that, at this level, they may be taken to be entities that can be referred to, said to have properties, and so on.

IV. A DEFENSE OF THE FICTIONALIST APPROACH

To begin with, here is an argument for (what could be called) the *primacy of the fictional character*. There could not be any external, literary discussion of fictional characters without there already being internal fictional characters to be thus discussed; but, on the other hand, there could be internal fictional characters without there being any external discussion of them at all, if we had plays and novels but no critical writings about them. Hence, fictional characters considered internally have a basic explanatory priority over external views of them. And a corresponding principle of the primacy of fictional *worlds* holds for fictional worlds instead of fictional characters, and so on for fictional events, et cetera. I shall henceforth use the term "fictions" to apply indifferently to the characters, events, and fictional worlds associated with fictional works, so that my general thesis here is that of the *primacy of fictions*.

In what does this primacy or explanatory priority of fictions consist? One way of conceiving it is in terms of truth: It is internal facts about fictions that are what *make true* any external or internal statements about them, whereas the converse does not hold. Or a notion of *dependency* could be appealed to, in that it could be claimed that the truth of any external statements about a fiction is dependent, in one way or another,[25] on the truth of various internal statements about the fictional facts in question.[26] Parenthetically, such fictional facts, of course, provide what I have also referred to as the "factual basis" for various claims about a fiction, whether they are everyday descriptive claims, or of some more theoretical kind such as the explanatory and epistemological kinds I discuss.

Thus, for example, the external statement that Hamlet is one of Shakespeare's most ambiguous leading characters is *made true,* if it is true, by internal facts about Hamlet and other Shakespearean characters, whereas it is not the case that statements of the internal facts of Shakespearean plays are made true by any external statements about the plays.

Second, if a literary critic discusses the character Hamlet, the *evidence* or *epistemic factual basis* for any claims that she or he makes, whether of an external or internal kind, must be provided by *internal* facts about Hamlet, such as facts about what he says or does in various fictional situations.[27]

Thus, for example, someone in an external discussion of a fiction may cite some writings of a critic as being authoritative concerning the work, but a more basic epistemic warrant for such a reference must involve an assumption that the critic in question had an adequate factual or evidential basis for her or his views, provided by *internal facts* about the play.[28] This second principle could be called that of the *factual justification of fictional claims*, or the *factual justification* principle for short. Unlike the first explanatory primacy principle, it is an *epistemic* principle concerning the factual basis that warrants or justifies statements about a fiction.

To be sure, there are also related issues of interpretation that would need to be addressed in a more complete account, but for the present it may be taken that differing interpretations of an artwork either involve the postulation of different fictional worlds or differing opinions about the contents of a single fictional world. I also do not address here issues about the "basic" contents of a world, namely, those directly described in a play, versus possibly various kinds of "implied" fictive content, which may be reasonably inferred from the basic contents and which could be regarded as issues concerning interpretation of a work.

The epistemic *factual justification* principle just presented should also be related to the discussion in the previous section of *authoritative representations* of a fiction. The overall picture being developed is one in which there are actually *three* stages or levels of epistemic justification of a claim—external or internal—about a fiction. In the first, lowest-level stage just discussed, a claim about fictional world X is sup-

ported by appealing to relevant facts about X; for example, the claim "Hamlet is the prince of Denmark" is supported by appealing to the corresponding fact or facts that provide its factual basis in the "Hamlet" fictional world.

But a second stage of epistemic justification is also needed, as an answer to the question "But how do you know that world X is indeed the 'Hamlet' world?"—rather than its being some similar but irrelevant fictional world, facts about which would have no bearing on the justification of claims about *Hamlet*. Here my discussion in the previous section of authoritative representations provides an appropriate answer: One can justify the claim that world X is indeed the "Hamlet" world by appealing to the existence of an *authoritative representation* Y of the play *Hamlet*, which represents precisely world X rather than some other fictional world no matter how similar that world may be to X.

Yet a third stage of epistemic justification may also be required, because someone might still ask, "But how do you know that representation Y *is* an authoritative representation of the 'Hamlet' world?" This is where the causal, historical, and intentional factors discussed in the previous section become relevant: It is by virtue of a representation's having the right or appropriate connections of those kinds that it counts as authoritative in representing correctly the "Hamlet" world.[29]

Thus, in epistemic terms, the primary or ultimate justification for claims about a play is provided by the third stage just outlined. However, in explanatory or semantic terms, it is the fiction itself that is primary, in some such way as was outlined above.

A possible objection to both of my principles—the primacy of fictions and the factual justification principle—should be briefly considered, according to which it is not anything fictional, but instead either the *text*, tokens of which are provided by copies of the work, or *performances* of a work that provide the factual basis for a fictional work.

However, as pointed out in section 2, one must distinguish between the *epistemic* authority of a text or performance and the prescriptive or factual basis of a play. In the former case a copy of a text may be authoritative because of its direct causal link with the author of the fiction, which has the implication that any other text differing from this one fails to be authoritative as a

source of *information* about its fictional characters. Thus, although an originative text is typically an authoritative source, this is not to say it is the text itself that provides the factual basis for claims about its fictional characters. Instead, those characters, and their characteristics, as *represented by* the authoritative text provide the factual basis for claims about the characters.

V. FICTIONS AND THE REAL WORLD

Some further discussion of various issues concerning the relations of fictions to the real world will now be provided. Returning to my claim that both external and internal statements may be about the same fictional entity, it is helpful to first indicate how a fictional world is located relative to the real world. A fictional world is, on my view, something that is genuinely related to the real world, in that it is typically created by one actual person at some particular time, in spite of the fact that it is, of course, a fictional or imaginary world. Minimally, this implies that the characters and events in a fictional world are related both to each other, defining their internal properties and relations, and to the real world in which they were created, thought about, and discussed, which defines their external properties and relations.

Another way to describe the differences between internal and external statements concerning a fictional world is as follows. If a real person, such as Richard Nixon, appears in a fictional work, one can distinguish the properties *ascribed* to him in the story, which constitute his internal properties in the story, from those properties that he had as a real person, *independently* of those ascribed to him in the story, which instead constitute his external properties. One can make a similar distinction for fictional characters and events as well: they both have internal properties, namely, those ascribed to them in a story or implied by those thus ascribed, as well as external properties that they have independently of their fictionally ascribed or implied properties, such as having been created or represented by a particular author at a particular time or being discussed by some literary critic at a later time.[30]

An advantage of this characterization of internal and external properties of a fictional character is that it can help to explain how certain modal statements about a character could be true

of him. For example, the claim "Hamlet could have had some characteristics different from those he does have" could be explained as an external statement claiming that Shakespeare could have ascribed different properties to Hamlet when creating the play *Hamlet.*

Something should also be said about an opposing view at this point. As noted previously, it is common for writers to assume that it is, strictly speaking, impossible to refer directly to a fictional character such as Hamlet, when such putative references are understood as being references to the "internal" character of a story; instead, it is claimed, one merely *pretends* or *imagines* (or "make-believes") that one thus refers. Or, more formally, it may be claimed that the whole linguistic context in which the apparent reference occurs is within the scope of an opaque story or fictional operator, so that, for instance, "it is fictional that Hamlet is the prince of Denmark" does not involve any reference to Hamlet or to supposed predications of him.[31]

My claim, on the contrary, is that, at a surface level at least, it is possible to refer to Hamlet and to make predications of him. However, my position is consistent with the following apparently related view, namely, that when one character in a story refers to another character in the same story, no *actual* reference occurs. Thus, I can agree that if it is fictional that Jane referred to Bill—in an innocuous, nonopaque sense of "it is fictional that," in which it merely indicates that a fictional case is being dealt with—then there is no implication that anybody *actually* referred to anyone. This is so because, on my view, Jane, her act of referring to Bill, and Bill himself are all fictional rather than actual.

Thus, in sum, of course fictional characters are not real persons, nor are their actions real actions, but any necessary distinction between being a real versus fictional person is adequately captured by the fact that fictional entities have some different properties and relations from those of real entities, such as being a fictional character or of being incomplete in various characteristic ways,[32] so that, as one would expect, references to fictional characters are in some ways like, but in other ways unlike, references to real entities. It is unnecessary to additionally deny that fictional entities can be referred to, along with consequent logical adjustments, such as bringing in opaque fictional operators.

VI. AN APPARENT COUNTEREXAMPLE

In this section, I shall briefly discuss an apparent kind of counterexample to the fictionality of plays thesis. Suppose someone claims "*Hamlet* is a very popular play." On my fictionalist view, on a straightforward interpretation this statement is equivalent to "The fictional world of *Hamlet* is a very popular play." However, it could be objected that most of the evidence relevant to the popularity of the play, such as large sales of copies of the play or abundant performances of it, is not evidence that is about or directly relevant to the fictional world of *Hamlet* at all, but instead it is evidence relevant to the play considered as a social institution. Thus, external statements of this kind fail to refer to, or be about or be true of, the corresponding fictional world, and, hence, such statements violate my fictionality of plays thesis.

Two kinds of replies are relevant here. In the first place, I agree that a play may legitimately be regarded as a social institution, but my analysis of what is involved in that institutionality (as given in section 1) is that strictly speaking one is then talking about *representations* of the play rather than the play itself. On this interpretation, the original popularity statement amounts to saying something like "representations of the play *Hamlet* are very popular," which casts no doubt on the fictional primacy thesis, since it is about representations such as copies or performances rather than being about the play itself.

A second kind of reply is as follows. One may distinguish the *evidence* for popularity—such as high copy sales and frequent performances, which, as just noted, strictly speaking concern representations rather the play itself—from the claimed *fact* of the play's popularity, and then argue that the admittedly representational evidence may well support an inference to the popularity of the fictional world that constitutes the play (which is represented by such copies or performances), in spite of the admitted indirectness of the evidence for such a conclusion.

VII. SPATIO–TEMPORAL LOCATION AND EXISTENCE

In this section, I shall briefly discuss issues concerning the spatio–temporal location and existential status of fictions. A useful foil for my view is the recent view of Thomasson, accord-

ing to which fictional characters are existent but abstract entities, which are abstract primarily because they lack a spatio-temporal location.[33]

However, on my view, this is typically incorrect. For example, Hamlet, as the Prince of Denmark, is presumably located in Denmark, during some historical period that happens not to be further specified by the author, but which must be assumed to be some particular time, since Hamlet is, in the story, a real individual with a definite location in space–time as is possessed by any real individual. Thus, as far as the internal view of Hamlet goes, he does have a spatio–temporal location in such stories—which is not to deny that it might be possible to construct a convincing story about characters who did not have any spatio–temporal location. It is a failing of Thomasson's externalist view that it is unable to give due weight to such basic facts about typical fictional characters.

Second, since both internal and external references to Hamlet are, on my view, references to the same internal fictional character, there is no other character-like entity about which further questions could be raised concerning its spatio–temporal location. Hence, my general answer to the question is that it is depends on the content of a fictional story as to whether or not its characters have a spatio–temporal location.[34]

As for the issue of existence, Thomasson claims that characters come into existence on being created by an author and go out of existence when no copies or memories of them remain.[35] But for me, plays and characters do not ever exist.[36] Instead, artistic creation simply makes a play or character become *available as an object of reference or thought* via its representation by an originative representation, which itself *does* come into existence at the time of its creation by the artist, where previously the play or character was not thus available; similarly, the demise of a play or character at a given time consists in their becoming unavailable as objects of reference after that time, because of the destruction of any remaining representations of them— whether physical or in human memory. Thus for me, external issues about the spatio–temporality of characters do not arise, since there are no existent characters about whom such issues could be raised. Admittedly, on my view, Hamlet may be externally named or referred to when appropriate representations exist, but such references are only to the same nonexistent or fictional individual Hamlet who is also the object of any internal references to him.

Perhaps it would be useful to clarify at this point how it is nevertheless possible for one and the same entity, such as the fictional character Hamlet, to both "exist in the play" and yet not exist in reality. Formally the answer is that the relevant existence and nonexistence claims are not incompatible, because they may be taken to claim that different *relational* properties hold (or do not hold) for Hamlet. To say that Hamlet exists in the play is to say that, *relative to the fictional world* in which he is a character, he has the same status as other characters or events that count as real in the story. And in this internal manner the fictional world of Hamlet itself counts as real, in that on an internal view it is entirely made up of such internally real characters, and so on.

On the other hand, to say that Hamlet does not exist in an external sense is to say that, *relative to the real world*, Hamlet does not have the same existential status as other inhabitants of the real world. And similarly for the "Hamlet" fictional world itself: It too, externally speaking, does not have the same existential status as the real world. Thus, since the reference classes for each of these relational properties are different, one and the same character Hamlet can both exist, relative to the fictional world, and not exist, relative to the real world, with similar points applying to the corresponding fictional world itself.[37]

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, here is a brief rationale for my position. First, the fictionality of plays thesis is one legitimate but previously unoccupied theoretical position on the status of narrative plays (and potentially, of other fictional artworks too), which deserves to be investigated in any case so that its strengths and weaknesses (if any) relative to more standard positions can become clearer.[38]

Second, my account is a natural and parsimonious one, which does not need to postulate any new entities[39] nor introduce elaborate paraphrases or reductions of natural referential ways of speaking about fictional entities.[40]

And third, the distinction of plays from repre-

sentations of them, which is integral to my theory, enables important distinctions to be articulated between explanatory and epistemic issues with respect to plays and other artworks, which have been largely neglected by alternative accounts.[41] Thus, for this reason too the current approach deserves consideration.[42]

JOHN DILWORTH
Department of Philosophy
Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan 49008

INTERNET: dilworth@wmich.edu

1. Such epistemic issues also arise in connection with other artworks, of course; see, for example, the discussion of artistic forgeries in painting, music, and literature in my "A Representational Theory of Artefacts and Artworks," *The British Journal of Aesthetics* 41 (2001): 353–370.

2. Authors discussing some concept of a "fictional world" include Gregory Currie, *The Nature of Fiction* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), section 2.1; Peter McCormick, *Fictions, Philosophies, and the Problems of Poetics* (Cornell University Press, 1988), chap. 7; Thomas G. Pavel, *Fictional Worlds* (Harvard University Press, 1986); and Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe: On the Foundations of the Representational Arts* (Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 1.

3. A more direct claim that they are identical might seem to imply an ontology in which there *are* plays and fictional worlds, so I avoid that formulation in my statement here for reasons that will become clear.

4. For example, in Peter Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View* (Cornell University Press, 1996), p. 9, Lamarque says, "Any adequate aesthetics of literature must acknowledge that literary works are not primarily psychological objects so much as institutional objects. . . . Without the existence of a complex social practice or institution in which texts fulfill determinate functions bound by convention, there could be no literary works." (However, as will shortly become clear, I have a different view of the function of literary texts).

5. On my view, this representational approach may be extended to artworks in general. See my "A Representational Theory of Artefacts and Artworks," in which I argue that paintings and other visual artworks are *represented by* (rather than being) artifacts and that this approach is at least initially persuasive for movies and literature in general. However, I should make it clear that it does not immediately follow from this view that all artworks are themselves *fictional*. That many literary works, operas, movies, et cetera, are about fictional characters or events is an undeniable fact; such works could then be argued to be fictional themselves, using similar arguments to those currently being given for plays, but substantive further arguments would be required to show that any other artworks are fictional in either sense.

6. In "A Representational Theory of Artefacts and Artworks," I argue against type-token views of artworks and show how the great diversity of kinds of representation func-

tions as a significant source of strength for my general representational approach to artworks.

7. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*.

8. Ibid., chap. 1.

9. Ibid., section 1.9.

10. Walton, in his *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, section 1.9, attempts to minimize his own dependence on such references. Also see section 3 below for further discussion of my point.

11. Ibid., p. 51, fn. 32.

12. I present arguments for it, as reinterpreted in terms of my own theory, in the next two sections.

13. However, as will become clear, it is my view that the prescriptive force prescribes not imaginings but rather which statements should be taken as being accurate descriptions of the work.

14. Of course, each art form or medium will have its own characteristic representational conditions, so that no epistemic uniformity across the arts, or even within a given art form at different times, is to be expected. For example, presumably the standards for authentic or accurate performance in the ballet and dance world changed significantly upon the introduction of an adequate choreographic notational system.

15. See my "A Representational Theory of Artefacts and Artworks."

16. "Typically" only, because, for example, a senile author might make various mistakes in some of his sentences, while a knowledgeable assistant—or a later editor—might correct these errors to produce a more authoritative text or representation, which yet is not strictly itself an originative representation of the work.

17. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, section 1.5.

18. Again, for me this prescriptive force is merely that of prescribing which propositions about a fictional world should be taken as being true of it, rather than, as in Walton's case, its involving the prescription of certain imaginings. (In the next section I shall introduce the idea of the *facts* or *factual basis* of a fictional world or artwork as that which prescribes the true propositions in question).

19. Related points are made by Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (Oxford University Press, 1982), p. 366–367, who holds that we should not impute to the discourse of ordinary people discussing fiction excessively sophisticated theoretical views about the nature of fiction; and Charles Crittenden, *Unreality: the Metaphysics of Fictional Objects* (Cornell University Press, 1991), chaps. 2 and 3, who argues that there are undeniably references to fictional objects, no matter what further theoretical construal we might attempt to give them.

20. For example, Crittenden, *Unreality: the Metaphysics of Fictional Objects*, pp. 94–95; Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View*, chap. 1; Amie L. Thomasson, "Fiction, Modality and Dependent Abstracta," *Philosophical Studies* 84 (1996): 295–320, esp. p. 301.

21. A related distinction of referential versus formal properties of a character is provided by Dauer in Francis W. Dauer, "The Nature of Fictional Characters and the Referential Fallacy," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 53 (1995): 31–38, where formal properties relate to the function played by a character in a work of art.

22. Including Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*; Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View*; Amie L. Thomasson, *Fiction and*

Metaphysics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*; and Peter Van Inwagen, "Creatures of Fiction," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 14 (1977): 299–308.

23. Crittenden, *Unreality*, pp. 42–44, argues for this view.

24. On a charitable reading, perhaps authors such as those cited in fn. 22 may be taken as being engaged in some form of this activity, in spite of their denial that reference may be made to fictional characters considered internally.

25. An account of the kinds of dependency involved will have to await another occasion.

26. In the case of both conceptions, the explanatory priority is explained in terms of the semantic concept of truth, so that no ontological issues about fictions are raised. Of course, with truth as with reference, some might argue that at some deeper level of explanation there are not really any internal truths about fictional entities. But as before, this does not affect the current surface-level discussion of fictional entities.

27. It is these internal facts that in the previous section I (in effect) argued to be the source of the prescriptivity of a play in mandating which propositions about the work are to count as being true.

28. An analogy is provided by a language dictionary: Words may be defined in terms of other words, but the ultimate evidential basis for meaning is provided by so-called "ostensive definitions," in which words are linked to extralinguistic entities. In the case of fiction, it is the sayings and doings of fictional entities that, at a surface level of explanation, provide the analogous factual basis of extralinguistic entities.

29. A perceptual analogy to the three stages of justification just outlined would be as follows. On one common realist view, one justifies a claim that snow is white by appeal to the fact of snow being white, which in turn is justified by an appeal to the veridicality of perception of the fact of snow being white, which veridicality itself requires some appropriate third stage of epistemic justification.

30. I have adapted this general point from a related one given by Thomasson in her "Fiction, Modality and Dependent Abstracta," pp. 300–301, but her view of fictional characters (as dependent abstract entities) is very different from mine.

31. Both views are very common, for example, Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*; Lamarque, *Fictional Points of View;* and Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe.*

32. Terence Parsons, *Nonexistent Objects* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), chap. 1, discusses such issues.

33. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, e.g., pp. 36–37.

34. This shows again that my account of the surface structure of fictions, and of talk about them, is able to avoid ontological issues such as that of whether fictional characters are abstract or concrete entities. I could also give a similar story-relative account of the issue as to whether fictional characters are *individual* versus *general* entities such as universals; here too I can simply reply that it depends on whether or not the relevant characters are *represented as* individuals or as universals, in the fictional story.

35. Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, chap. 1.

36. That is, not in the standard or absolute sense of existence, as opposed to the relational sense discussed in the next footnote.

37. This account is compatible with the standard nonrelational concept of existence, in terms of which fictions do not exist (absolutely). But my relational account is all that is needed to explain the sense in which fictional characters do typically exist "in a story," as opposed to their not existing "in reality." To be more explicit, the two concepts (of what could be called relational or R-existence, and nonrelational or NR-existence) are related as follows. R-existence in a fictional world is a nonontological concept, having no implications as to the NR-existence status of an object. R-existence (or nonexistence) in the real world for an object entails that the object also NR-exists (or does not NR-exist). Throughout the paper, whenever the term "exists" is used without qualification, it is the standard concept of NR-existence that is being used.

38. Of course, for reasons of space this paper has been able to do no more than provide an initial sketch of the fictionality position and of the many issues arising from it. One important issue that I shall attempt to address on another occasion is that of how my general approach could account for both representational and nonrepresentational artworks. But my discussion in fn. 5 that shows why I am not committed to a claim that all artworks are fictional is at least a first step in that direction.

39. Such as does Thomasson's view in Thomasson, *Fiction and Metaphysics*, according to which fictional characters are existent abstract entities.

40. As does, for instance, Currie's account in *The Nature of Fiction*.

41. Such as that of Walton in *Mimesis as Make-Believe*.

42. My thanks to an anonymous referee for very helpful comments on this paper.