Do We Really Feel Emotion toward Fictional Objects ?
——A Debate on Walton's
Mimesis as Make-Believe——

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Introduction

In his *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, Kendall Walton explains representational arts by analogy with children's games of make-believe. Walton thinks that the notion of make-believe in children's games can be extended to the representational arts such as novels, plays, films, figurative painting, saying that the games of make-believe in childhood continue in adults' interaction with representational arts.

From this basic standpoint, Walton examines features of representation, the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, appreciation of representational art, the nature of verbal and pictorial representation, etc. Among many problems discussed in this book, what I would like to focus on is Walton's conception of the appreciators' participation in works of representational art, which has often been disputed, in particular, the problem of emotional response to fictions.

In this paper, I would first like to examine Walton's basic view of participation in representational art as a game of make-believe and the role of the participants' imagination, and then try to answer the question whether we really feel emotion towards fictions.

I

In both children's and adults' games of make-believe, Walton thinks

that imagination plays the most important role. He says, "Games of make-believe are one species of imaginative activity; specifically, they are exercise of the imagination involving *props*."[1]

Walton takes the example such as the game of bears with stumps which Gregory and Eric play. Imagining that stumps are bears, their make-believe game starts. Both of them know that the stumps are not real bears, but they believe that bears exist in the fictional world. In this game of make-believe, the stumps are the "props". Walton defines props as "generators of fictional truths, things which, by virtue of their nature or existence, make propositions fictional"[2]. Children are prompted to imagine things by the props and belong to the fictional world, i. e. their game. And it is true that the stumps are the bears in the world of their game, not in the real world.

But fiction is to be imagined in connection with the real world. For example, as Walton says, if a child has a doll in his arms, the participants in the game of make-believe are to imagine that he is holding a baby. In this case, the fictional baby in the game, which is to be imagined, is dependent on the existence of babies in the real world. Walton says that there are three major roles that real things often have in our imaginative experiences, i.e. prompting imagining, being objects of imagining, and generating fictional truths, or serving as "props" in games of make-believe.[3] As a prompter, the doll causes us to imagine a baby. Then we imagine the doll to be a baby, so that the doll is an object of imagining. And, seeing the doll in a child's arms, the participants of the game are prompted to imagine a baby in the real world, and it is true that the doll is a baby in the fictional world, so the doll is a prop in the game. In this game of make-believe, the participants are aware that it is fictional that the doll is a baby, and see the doll as if it were a real baby. Therefore the function of the prop is to prescribe imaginings, for example, that the doll is a baby.

As the participants in their game of make-believe, the children also act and feel as part of the fictional world and function as its props. When the children find the "bear" and yell with fright, it is not real but

fictional that they are frightened and yelling. They are not really fright-
ened of the fictional bear. They just pretend to be frightened. Thus the
children's acts and feelings are true in the fictional world. They pretend
to feel and act in the game as if they really felt and acted.

Walton thinks that representational art also involves a fictional
world just like children's games of make-believe. In his view, works of
representational art such as paintings, novels, etc. are props in games of
make-believe in the same way as dolls, toy trucks, etc. are. And the
appreciators of the works of representational art are the participants of
the games of make-believe. Although the appreciators do not belong to
the fictional world as part of the works of art themselves, they generate
the fictional world using the works of art as props to imagine something,
so that they are like children playing the game of make-believe. Walton
says that "appreciators use paintings and novels as props in games of
make-believe, much as children use dolls and toy trucks, and that appre-
ciators participate in these games. In addition to the world of the work,
there is a world of the appreciator's game. And the appreciator belongs
to *this* world."[4]

The appreciators participate in "the game" regarding the work of
art as a prop, and their attitude makes the work fictional. So, according
to Walton, the works need not be intended as fictions by the persons who
make them. For example, Greek myths may have been nonfiction for the
ancient Greeks, but they are fiction for us now because we treat them as
fiction.[5] Just as children use the natural objects such as stumps as the
props of their games, the readers use the Greek myths as the props to
prompt their imagining and generate the fictional world.

According to Walton, the appreciators make a work of representa-
tional art into a prop of a game of make-believe, which generates fiction-
al truths by the appreciators' imagining. But our question is whether i-
magination always functions in this way in all the cases of appreciating
works of representational art. Walton mentions that *Jaws* caused a lot of
people to fear sharks, but this does not mean that people were afraid of
the fictional sharks in the movie.[6] In this case, people were frightened

and avoided swimming in the ocean because they thought there might be such sharks. But how did they think so? They *imagined* the possibility of existence of real sharks from seeing the fictional sharks in the movie. Their imagination, however, works to make them forget that what they are seeing is just fiction and has no relation to the real. The audiences, of course, should know that the sharks in the movie are fictional. But they confuse the fictional with the real in their imagination. The function of the audiences' imagination here should be different from that of the children playing with a doll. But Walton does not distinguish these functions of imagination. As Charlton criticises, Walton's notion of imagination is confused.[7] Walton pays no attention to the variety of functions of the imagination. This leads to a crucial defect of his theory.

<div align="center">II</div>

Based on his paradigm of a game of make-believe, Walton examines psychological participation of the appreciators of works of representational art, and tries to show how we feel emotion toward fiction, for instance, how we fear fiction. But Walton's view about the appreciators' emotional response to works of representational art seems to be confused, and it has been criticised.

If the appreciators of representational art are analogous with the children playing games of make-believe, what the appreciators feel about the works of representational art should not be real but fictional. Walton takes the example that "Charles is watching a horror movie about a terrible green slime"[8], and considers whether Charles is really terrified. Walton says that Charles's condition is similar in certain obvious respects to that of a person frightened of a pending real-world disaster. Charles has feelings of fear and his muscles are tensed, his pulse quickens, etc., and he describes himself as "terrified of the slime". But his physiological-psychological state does not constitute genuine fear of the slime. Walton calls this physiological-psychological state "quasi-fear".[9] And he thinks that Charles is not really terrified of the slime even if his

are genuine feelings of fear.

Walton says, "In many ways, Charles is like a child, Timmy, playing a game of make-believe with his father."[10] When the father pretends to be a ferocious monster, Timmy screams in fright and flees to the next room, but enjoys doing so and comes back for more. That is because "he is perfectly aware that his father is only playing, that the whole thing is just a game, and that only fictionally is there a vicious monster after him".[11] Therefore he is not really afraid, and it is fictional that he is afraid. Just like Timmy, Charles is also fictionally afraid when he watches the horror movie. Charles is perfectly aware that the slime is not real and that he is in no danger.[12] So he never believes that he is endangered by the slime, but believes that it is fictional that he is endangered by the slime. And his belief causes his quasi-fear. Thus, watching the horror movie, Charles plays a game of make-believe.

Walton explains that both Timmy and Charles are like actors who play the parts of themselves in their theatrical events. Charles, as well as Timmy, generates a fictional world about himself, and he plays the role of himself in the fiction. In this way, he works as a kind of prop, which Walton calls "a reflexive prop" in his game of make-believe. Thus both the appreciator and the work of representational art belong to the world of the appreciator's game of make-believe.

So Walton thinks that the appreciators just fictionally feel or pretend to feel emotion toward the works of representational art. In *The Philosophy of Horror*, Carroll interprets Walton's theory as "the pretend theory of fictional response".[13] Carroll is of the opinion that we can really feel emotion toward fiction, so he mentions Walton's "pretend theory" and makes an objection to it in his book. He says that if the audience is only pretending to be horrified by a horror movie just like the children playing a game of make-believe, they should be aware of playing the game and voluntarily participate in the game, that is, being horrified by the movie, because "surely a game of make-believe requires the intention to pretend".[14] But the audiences are not aware of playing a game. He also uses his own experience which shows he is genuinely horrified by

horror movies. What the audiences feel about works of art is beyond their control. So there is no analogy between the audiences of fictions and the children playing the games of make-believe. Thus, Carroll denies that the audience member works as a prop generating the fictional world about himself, because of lack of his intention of playing the role of himself.

In another place, Carroll criticises Walton's theory from a different point of view.[15] Here he says that Walton's pretend theory of fictional response cannot explain "why so often we are *not* moved by fictions".[16] Carroll thinks that if we just make-believedly fear the fiction, we should be able to make-believe that we are frightened of bad horror movies, which are not good enough as props of games of make-believe, as well as good horror movies, because the inclination to play the game of make-believe is much more crucial than the props themselves. But we cannot be afraid of bad horror movies, and this fact shows that we do not play games of make-believe when we watch horror movies. So here is a dis-analogy between participating in games of make-believe and appreciating fictions. In other words, if the audiences are inclined to play a game of make-believe, they should not fail to feel fictional emotion for the bad props, but, in fact, they fail, and that is because they do not intentionally play a game of make-believe. Carroll thinks that Charles is really afraid of the slime which is portrayed in the horror film, even if it is a fictional object and he is perfectly aware of it.

In his answer to Carroll's criticism, however, Walton does not answer the question of whether the appreciators of works of representational art intentionally play a game of make-believe. He avoids this question by substituting the problem of the object of the appreciators' emotional response for it.

Answering Carroll's criticism, Walton first says that he does not deny "that appreciation of works of fiction is a genuinely emotional experience, that readers and spectators feel real emotions in response to novels and plays and movies".[17] But he says that an audience member's response to the Green Slime movie "does not consist in her genuinely

fearing the slime; it is merely fictional that she fears it".[18] Seeing the Green Slime movie, the audiences can really fear, but their real fear is not fear *of the slime* portrayed in the movie. When Walton talks about Charles's fear of the Slime movie, he says, "Our question is whether his experience, however intense, was one of fear of the slime. It may have been a genuinely emotional experience. He may even have been genuinely frightened, as we shall see. But he was not afraid of the slime."[19] Then, what do the audiences like Charles really fear? Walton says that the audiences may really fear when they are reminded of real life dangers by the fictional slime depicted in the movie.[20] So the audiences are really afraid of some real thing which the slime reminds of them, but is never really afraid of the slime itself. And Walton says that an audience member "may feel genuine emotions toward the movie, toward the *portrayal* of the slime. She may be disgusted or shocked or amazed by it——or even afraid of it".[21] Since the audience member participates in the game of make-believe when she sees the movie, she feels real emotions toward the movie just as she feels real emotions when she plays any game, but she does not feel any genuine emotion towards the fictional slime depicted in the movie. In his book, Walton takes the following example. If Charles has a bad heart, he may be afraid of the horror movie or experiencing the movie, because he knows that he could get heart attack, being excited by the movie depicting the slime as being very threatening. In this case, Charles's fear of the movie is real one. But the object of his real fear is not the slime depicted in the movie but the movie depicting the slime, which may induce a real life danger, i.e. the heart attack.[22]

Unlike Carroll, Walton does not think that Charles is really afraid of the slime, the fictional object depicted in the movie. Charles really fears the movie itself or seeing the movie. Concerning the slime, however, Charles is never really afraid of it. Walton says, "It is not true but fictional that he fears the slime."[23] Appreciating the fictional object, i.e. the slime depicted in the movie, Charles plays a game of make-believe and makes a fictional world which includes both the movie and himself. Walton says, "We don't just observe fictional worlds from without. We live

in them (in the worlds of our games, not work worlds)".[24] And we are aware that this world of our game is merely fictional, but from inside of the world, it is real for us.[25] So Charles should really fear the slime in the fictional world where both Charles and the slime exist together, but, in the real world, i.e. outside the fictional world, Charles just make-believedly fears the slime. This is the way to play a game of make-believe. In Walton's view, appreciating fictional objects, audiences always play games of make-believe so that they fictionally feel emotion toward fictional objects. Just as Timmy knows that the monster is not real one but his father, so Charles knows that the slime is just a fiction in the movie. In this way, Charles is similar to Timmy. So, if Charles says that he is frightened *of the slime*, it is not true but fictional. Therefore, to be exact, Walton should say that Charles may really be frightened of the depiction of the slime in the movie, but is not frightened of the depicted slime itself.

To prompt the audiences to imagine that they are in danger and to make-believedly fear the fictional objects, however, the movie should be of good quality to work as a prop. Walton answers Carroll's question, why so often we are not moved by fictions, saying that some bad works of art do not have the capacity to prompt us to engage in make-believe.[26] According to Walton, a horror movie "must be made fictional in the viewer's game that induces in her quasi-fear sensations, and the movie together with those sensations must not only prescribe but actually succeed in prompting her vivid imagining of the danger and of her terror"[27], but not all movies can succeed in doing this. It is Walton's premise that we are always inclined to play games of make-believe to appreciate fictions, but sometimes we fail to play when the works are too bad. But Walton does not explain how the appreciators of fictions always intend to play games of make-believe, so he does not give a perfect answer to Carroll who doubts whether the appreciators of fictions really intentionally play games of make-believe and pretend to feel emotion toward them.

So we should try to answer the questions asked by Carroll; What is

fictional, the appreciators' emotion itself, or the objects of their emotion? And do the appreciators participate in the works of representational art in the same way as children playing a game of make-believe? To answer them, we shall see Lamarque's view in the next section.

III

Lamarque is critical of Walton's theory of fearing fictions as well as Carroll, and his criticism is basically in accord with that of Carroll's. Lamarque understands Walton's view that Charles does not fear the slime because it does not exist, and agrees with it. But what he asks about is, in particular, the relation between the fictionality of the object of fear and that of fear itself.

In his review of Walton's book, Lamarque discusses Walton's idiom, "It is fictional that". He distinguishes three ways of use of "It is fictional that";

(1) It is fictional that John believes that the monster is attacking New York City.

(2) John believes that it is fictional that the monster is attacking New York City.

(3) John believes that the fictional monster is attacking New York City.

According to Lamarque, Walton rejects the narrowest scope of "It is fictional that", (3), and favours (1), in which John is represented as a participant in a fictional world, but does not deny the value of descriptions like (2), in which John is not a participant but just an observer of the fictional world, and he uses "scope differences" to explain several puzzling phenomena, for example, Arthur's conflicting desires to see a tragedy and to want its heroine to be saved, or why we get pleasure from reading or viewing the same work repeatedly.[28] Walton surely uses the "scope differences" of "It is fictional that" to explain such particular cases of psychological participation in fiction. But, concerning the problem of fearing fictions, Walton does not use but rather confuses the scope differ-

ences. As Lamarque points out, Walton says that Charles's quasi-fear of the slime is caused by his realization that the slime fictionally threatens him[29]. But Lamarque's question is why Charles's realization of the fictionality of the object should cause the fictionality of his fear itself.[30] In other words, Charles realizes the fictionality of the slime as an observer from outside the fictional world, but Lamarque doubts if it makes Charles a participant of the fictional world.

Lamarque says that the fictionality of the slime does not bar Charles from having real fear. He thinks that the object of Charles's fear is not real but fictional, but it does not make his fear fictional. He accepts that Charles plays the game of make-believe imagining himself in the world with the green slime which he watches on the screen, but does not think Charles's feeling of fear belongs to the game of make-believe. In other words, he thinks that the object of Charles's fear belongs to the fictional world, but Charles's fear itself belongs to the real world. Charles does not pretend to fear, so that his fear should be real. Lamarque says that Charles's condition is not like children who play a game of make-believe, and Walton's basic paradigm of the game of make-believe does not work in this case. In his view, just the object of Charles's fear is not real, but this fact has nothing to do with the nature of Charles's fear itself.

Then, how does Charles really fear? Lamarque says that what Charles is frightened of, i.e. the intentional content of his fear, is "the imagined slime", which is not a kind of real slime, nor a fictitious entity[31]. In Lamarque's view, Charles's imagination plays an important role in fearing fiction, but he does not clearly explain the function of Charles's imagination. How does his imagination function? Lamarque says that when Charles watches the Green Slime movie, he imagines that he is in the world with the slime[32]. There can be two ways of imagining "that he is in the world with the slime". One of them is to imagine that he is a fictional character in the fictional world with the slime. The other is to imagine that the slime exists in the real world where Charles lives as a real person.

If Charles's imagination functions in the first way, then Charles him-

self becomes part of the fictional world playing a role of a fictional char-
acter, so that all of his reactions to the fiction including his fear of the
slime are those of the fictional character's. This way of participation in
fiction is the same as that of children playing games of make-believe and
actors playing fictional characters in dramas, movies, etc. If there is an
actor who plays a person frightened of the slime in the movie, he pre-
tends to be a person in the world with the green slime and acts as the
person expressing his pretend fear. He is completely aware that he plays
in the fictional movie and fictionally fears the slime, imagining himself as
a person who is really afraid of the slime. His imagination should func-
tion in the same way as that of Timmy, or children playing with a doll,
etc., so he is similar to Timmy playing with his father by the function of
his imagination. The only difference is that he plays someone else's part,
while Timmy plays the part of himself. But he participates in the fictional
world in the similar way as the children playing the game of make-be-
lieve. If Charles participates in the fictional world in this way, however,
his fear of the slime should be that of the fictional character he plays by
imagining, and it is not real but fictional. As a fictional character, he can-
not really fear the slime.

Therefore, if Charles really fears the slime, his imagination should
function in another way. That is to imagine that the slime, the fictional
object, exists in the real world. This function of Charles's imagination
should be like that of the audiences of *Jaws*. Charles is prompted to i-
magine the fictional world with the slime by the images of the movie, but
he does not treat the world with the slime as the fictional world which is
separated from the real world. He rather confuses two worlds with his
imagination, and this is why he imagines that he is in the world with the
slime. Although he participates in the fictional world with his imagining,
his way of participation is different from that of children or actors, so
that his participation can cause real fear because he himself does not be-
long to the fictional world as its prop. Unlike Timmy who plays a game
of make-believe with his father or an actor who plays a person being
afraid of the slime, Charles can really fear what he watches on the

screen, because his imagination functions to make the boundary of the fictional world and the real world unclear, and, as Lamarque says, real fear can survive across two worlds[33].

In which way does our imagination function when we watch a horror movie? If our imagination functions in the first way, we have to enter the fictional world as fictional characters, and so we remake the fiction as the one which includes ourselves as fictional existence. As the audiences of the horror movie, however, we do not remake the movie each time we watch it. Timmy can remake the fictional world of his game each time he plays the game of make-believe with his father. The actors can remake the theatrical works each time they play the roles in the works, if they play differently. But we, audiences of the horror movie do not enter and remake the fiction. We always stay in the real world and observe what happens in the fictional world. Therefore our imagination does not function in the first way but functions in the second way. And we should really fear the horror movie. As Lamarque says in his "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?", we do not enter a fictional world as fictional characters, but have the fictional characters enter our real world[34].

So Charles really fears the slime as a real person in the real world. The "imagined slime" should be the slime which is brought to the real world with Charles's imagination, so that it is the "intentional content" of his real fear. Watching the movie, Charles's imagination functions to make him think that there may be such a slime in the world. Charles's real fear is caused by his imagining, and he never pretends to fear. Therefore Charles is not like an actor because the actor is never really afraid of the slime, nor like Timmy who plays a game of make-believe with his father and pretends to fear. So Walton's view that both children playing the game of make-believe and Charles are like actors is wrong, because just the children are like actors.

Since the function of Charles's imagination is different from that of actors and children playing a game of make-believe, Charles does not participate in the fictional world to play a game of make-believe. Therefore Carroll and Lamarque are right in thinking that Walton's paradigm

of a game of make-believe is not suitable for this case. Although the object of Charles's fear is fictional, his fear itself is not fictional but real.

Conclusion

The discussion of fearing fictions can be applied to explain the other emotional responses toward fiction. For example, if an audience member feels pity for a miserable heroine in a movie, he does not imagine himself as a fictional character who belongs to the world of the movie and does not pretend to feel pity, but imagines the heroine as a person in the real world and really feels pity for her.

So we shall conclude as follows. When a person participates in a fictional world, there are two ways of participation. One of them is to become part of the fiction, or, using Walton's words, to participate as a prop of the fiction. In this case, the person tries to enter into the fictional world imagining that he is a kind of fictional character, so that he pretends to feel or fictionally feels. This is to play a game of make-believe. Children who play with dolls, toy trucks, etc. and actors playing roles of fictional persons in theatres participate in fiction in this way. The other way of participation is to stay in the real world and try to bring the fiction closer to the real world imagining that the fiction is like the real. In this case, the person does not play a game of make-believe and really feels emotion towards the fiction as a real person in the real world. The appreciators of works of representational art participate in the world of works in the second way. Therefore, we really feel emotion toward the fictional objects in the works of representational art.

NOTES
1)   Kendall L. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe : On the Foundations of the*

Representational Arts, Harvard U. P., 1990, p. 12.

2) *Ibid.*, p. 37.

3) *Ibid.*, p. 21.

4) Kendall L. Walton, "Précis of *Mimesis as Make-Believe : On the Founda-tions of the Representational Arts*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LI, No. 2, June 1991, p. 380.

5) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, pp. 91-98.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 202.

7) "Book Reviews", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 31, No. 4, October 1991, p. 370.

8) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, p. 196.

9) *Ibid.*, p. 196.

10) *Ibid.*, p. 242.

11) *Ibid.*, p. 242.

12) *Ibid.*, p. 197.

13) Noël Carroll, *The Philosophy of Horror, or Paradoxes of the Heart*, Routledge, New York & London, 1990, p. 68.

14) *Ibid.*, p. 75.

15) Carroll, "On Kendall Walton's *Mimesis as Make-Believe*", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LI, No. 2, June 1991, pp. 383-387.

16) *Ibid.*, p. 385.

17) Walton, "Reply to Reviewers", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LI, No. 2, June 1991, p. 413.

18) *Ibid.*, p. 413.

19) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, p. 197.

20) Walton, "Reply to Reviewers", *Philosophy and phenomenological Research*, Vol. LI, No. 2, June 1991, p. 413.

21) *Ibid.*, p. 413.

22) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-believe*, p. 202.

23) *Ibid.*, p. 242.

24) *Ibid.*, p. 273.

25) *Ibid.*, p. 273.

26) Walton, "Reply to Reviewers", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. LI, No. 2, June 1991, p. 413.

27) *Ibid.*, p. 413.

28) Peter Lamarque, "Essay Review", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 49, No. 2, Spring 1991, pp. 163 f.

29) Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*, p. 245.

30) Lamarque, *op. cit.*, p. 164.

31) *Ibid.*, p. 164.

32) *Ibid.*, p. 164.

33) *Ibid.*, p. 164.

34) Peter Lamarque, "How Can We Fear and Pity Fictions?", *British Journal of Aesthetics*, Vol. 21, No.4, Autumn 1981, p. 292.