

PHIL 4403: Philosophy of Art  
Prof. Funkhouser  
3/30/05  
Walton, "Fearing Fictions"

I.

\* Q: Does Charles *really* fear the green slime? (Walton thinks not.)

II.

\*One can fear that which does not exist. But this fear typically requires the belief that the thing exists, or that it probably does exist, or that it could exist.

\*Undeniably, Charles is in the state of "quasi-fear":

quasi-fear: "His muscles are tensed, he clutches his chair, his pulse quickens, his adrenalin flows. Let us call this physiological/psychological state "quasi-fear". (308)

\*But, Walton claims, Charles is not really afraid, because he does not believe himself to be in danger. (He doesn't call the cops, run out of the theater, etc.)

--Maybe he "half-believes" he's in danger, though? Or, *part* of him believes this? Charles doesn't half-believe this, though—he *fully* knows it is fictional. The only possible symptoms possessed by Charles for attributing such a belief are automatic responses like sweating, pulse increase, etc. But these are not things done for reasons, so we do not need to attribute a belief to explain them.

III.

\*Walton using 'fictional truth' to cover a truth in any fictional world—be it in art, children's games, dreams, imagination etc.

--But there are two classes of fictional truths: the explicitly imagined, and those generated by rules of imagining (though not necessarily imagined)

IV.

\*Walton thinks that Charles' green slime experience is like that of the child whose father is pretending to be a monster. (311) Charles, like the child, is only playing a game of make-believe. In particular, it is only make-believe that Charles is afraid. (Movie-goers, not just actors, are pretending!)

"It is partly the fact that Charles is in a state of quasi-fear, the fact that he feels his heart pounding, his muscles tensed, etc., which makes it make-believe that he is afraid." (311)

“In short, my suggestion is this: the fact that Charles is quasi-afraid as a result of realizing that make-believable the slime threatens him generates the truth that make-believable he is afraid of the slime.” (311)

## V.

\*There is the public fictional world displayed on the movie screen, and the private fictional world that includes Charles’ private sensations. (313)

Analogy: “Charles’s state of mind supplements the movie he is watching in the way an illustration supplements what it illustrates.” (313)

--When Charles says things like “Watch out, here it comes!” he is not sincerely voicing these claims. He is pretending to assert, not really asserting.

## VI.

\*What Walton says about quasi-fear generalizes to other emotions—like pity, envy, etc.

\*Walton rejects phrases like “suspension of disbelief” and “decrease of distance” to describe the phenomenon of entering into a fictional world. Instead:

“Rather than somehow fooling ourselves into thinking fictions are real, we become fictional. So we end up “on the same level” with fictions.” (316)

--This is supposed to explain the allure of fiction:

“It is chiefly by fictionally facing certain situations, engaging in certain activities, and having or expressing certain feelings, I think, that a dreamer, fantasizer, or game player comes to terms with his actual feelings—that he discovers them, learns to accept them, purges himself of them, or whatever exactly it is that he does.” (316)

“The important place that novels, plays, and films have in our lives appears mysterious only on the supposition that we merely stand outside fictional worlds and look in, pressing our noses against an inviolable barrier. Once our presence within fictional worlds is recognized, suitable explanations seem within reach.” (317)

## VII.

\*Walton also claims that his theory handles 2 other puzzles: i) the apparent conflict between wanting a heroine to suffer and wanting her (merely in make-believe!) not to suffer, and ii) why we experience suspense (or interest, or concern, etc.) over an outcome we know to be certain.