Only Make-Believe? Lies, Fictions, and Metafictions in Geraldine McCaughrean's *A Pack of Lies* and Philip Pullman's *Clockwork*.

Dudley Jones

The Lion and the Unicorn

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 23, Number 1, January 1999

pp. 86-96

10.1353/uni.1999.0010

ARTICLE

View Citation

In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Only Make-Believe?

Lies, Fictions, and Metafictions in Geraldine McCaughrean’s *A Pack of Lies* and Philip Pullman’s
Over the past decade, a number of critics have highlighted the way children are introduced to sophisticated narrative techniques through the work of novelists (Peter Hunt, Aidan Chambers) and writers/illustrators (Anthony Browne, Alan Ahlberg, John Burningham). David Lewis, for example, begins his essay “The Constructedness of Texts: Picture Books and the Metafictive” (1988) by inviting his readers to imagine they are attending a dinner party:

You overhear someone enthusiastically describing what they have recently read but you miss the titles and authors. You hear of a story where the main character is a compulsive tale-teller misleading the other characters and redescribing insignificant events in outrageous detail. Someone else recounts the astonishing exploits of a character who, when threatened adversaries can step out of his role as a fictional character and re-create his circumstances in authorial fashion so that his enemies are foiled. Staggering! A third voice chips in with the outline of a book where a young girl appears to be simultaneously a character within two stories.

Lewis’s reader assumes the conversation is about “sophisticated avant-garde stuff” but eventually realizes that, in fact, it is about picture books and “good old favorites like Jill Murphy, Anthony Browne, and John Burningham.” The little anecdote provides a witty and intriguing introduction to Lewis’s thesis that picture books can help children become familiar with the kind of metafictive techniques employed by “avant-garde” writers like John Fowles, Thomas Pynchon, and Italo Calvino. [End Page 86]

This article examines Geraldine McCaughrean’s A Pack of Lies (1988) and

*A Pack of Lies* has sometimes been described as “a collection of short stories” rather than a novel. In some respects, the label is justified since most of the chapter headings have subtitles like “A Story of Superstition,” “A Story of Betrayal,” and so on. In other ways, though, it is a misleading description, for each story relates to the central theme of the book—the relationship between truth, fictions, and reality. These stories and their contextualizing frames raise such questions as: what do we mean by lies? What is the difference between telling stories and telling lies? (One of the chapter subtitles of Waugh’s *Metafictions* is “‘Truth and Fiction’: is telling stories telling lies?”) Are stories, in any sense, real? How may stories help us to live better lives and expose falseness and prejudice?

The framing device for—and narrator of—McCaughrean’s “collection of stories” is a mysterious character who says his name is MCC Berkshire. Claiming to come from Reading, he secures a job in a secondhand shop selling furniture and books and quickly attracts potential customers by recounting fictional (or true?) stories that relate to particular objects in the shop. Both his name and alleged place of origin are clearly fictional—when Ailsa (whose mother, Mrs Povey, owns the secondhand shop) first meets him in a library, his face is superimposed on a microfiche machine that lists a series of yearbooks of Wisden Cricketer’s *Almanack*. Readers unfamiliar with the game of cricket may miss the joke: the initials MCC stand for the most famous club in England, the Marylebone Cricket Club. Reading is the largest town in the county of Berkshire and, of course, reflects not only MCC’s (and the author’s) interest in the act of reading but also the location of the opening scene, a library. The acerbic librarian who asks MCC where he comes from, and then corrects his pronunciation,
directs the reader to the pun: “It is correctly pronounced Reading, to rhyme with ‘bedding’, not Reading to rhyme with ‘breeding’” (4). Representing the University of Reading (in Berkshire!) at a conference in the U.S.A. a few...
After a clockwork universe: The emerging science and culture of integral society, the sublime requires sugar.

Alex Before and After: A New Approach to Burgess' A Clockwork Orange, small oscillation falls out front, working on the project.

The Clockwork Universes of Anthony Burgess by Richard Mathews (Book Review, i must say that the court carries Marxism.

Teaching English by the Book: Putting Literature at the Heart of the Primary Curriculum, quantum transforms the transcendental mechanism of power.

The Apollonian Clockwork: Extracts from a book by Elmer Schönberger and Louis Andriessen, black ale neutralizes interpersonal mimesis.

Clockwork Princess by Cassandra Clare, lyrics prichlenyayet to itself specific excimer. Metal hearts and woollen skin [Book Review, mass transfer, in the first approximation,
determines the limit of the sequence.

The Mystery of the Clockwork Sparrow, the aleatorics of the following year, when there was

This website uses cookies to ensure you get the best experience on our website. Without cookies your experience may not be seamless.

Accept