



BROWSE



 **Trouble in the Farm Yard: Labor Relations and Politics in  
Doreen Cronin's Duck Books**

Kimberly Jack

Children's Literature Association Quarterly

Johns Hopkins University Press

Volume 30, Number 4, Winter 2005

pp. 409-425

10.1353/chq.2006.0012

ARTICLE

[View Citation](#)

---

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

**Trouble in the Farm Yard:  
Labor Relations and Politics in Doreen Cronin's Duck  
Books**

*Kimberly Jack (bio)*

In *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* (2000), *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* (2002), and *Duck for President* (2004), author Doreen Cronin and illustrator Betsy Lewin rewrite the farmyard as a site of labor activism and political action. The first two works, *Click, Clack, Moo* and *Giggle, Giggle, Quack*, recast farm animals as agricultural workers utilizing their collective voice to gain benefits from the farm's management. *Duck for President* uses characters established in the earlier books in an ever-expanding depiction of the American political arena. Although Betsy Lewin's illustrations avoid total anthropomorphization of the farm animals, Cronin's text situates the animals as laborers who manipulate various implements of writing to communicate and negotiate with the farm's human management in the form of Farmer Brown and his brother Bob.

Diverse groups and individuals have seized upon this dynamic in their efforts to design educational programs. They cite Cronin's books as resources for educating children about labor relations and socialism, economics and blackmail, literacy and disenfranchisement, as well as other topics. But such attempts raise questions about the degree to which the books can be used as primers. To what extent do they effectively introduce concepts of literacy, labor dynamics, and the electoral process? Are the goals and practices of the animals in the books positive models of behavior to offer to children? Or should the books be read as satire, serving to convince citizens, at the earliest age, that politicians and union activists seek only selfish luxury? How do we determine the dividing line between parody and satire in the three works? And furthermore, how does our conception of the books' audience influence our readings and uses of them? To what extent does adult readers' privileged knowledge of American culture and history encourage an intertextual reading of the books, thereby influencing the "lessons" gleaned from the texts by parents and educators? **[End Page 409]**

## The Duck Books

A brief summary of the Duck books' production attests to the books'

appeal and provides some insight into why the books have been perceived as both politically radical and politically conservative. *Click, Clack, Moo* was written by Doreen Cronin in memory of her late father, a member of the policemen's union. Betsy Lewin was called in to illustrate once the text had been accepted for publication (Castellitto). Daniel Pinkwater read the book on NPR's *Weekend Edition*, and it later received the Caldecott Honor. Cronin and Lewin, both New York residents, met after the book became popular and chose to collaborate on *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* (2002), *Duck for President* (2004), and their recent alphabet book, *Click, Clack, Quackity-Quack* (2005).<sup>1</sup>

In *Click, Clack, Moo*'s relatively simple plot, Farmer Brown's cows find an old typewriter in the barn and use it to communicate a request for electric blankets. When Farmer Brown refuses, the cows withhold milk and persuade the hens to join them on strike. With the aid of a "neutral party," Duck, Farmer Brown eventually agrees to trade the electric blankets for the typewriter. The cows accept the blankets and turn over the typewriter, but Duck absconds with the machine and uses it to demand a diving board for the pond.

In *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* Farmer Brown goes on vacation, leaving his brother, Bob, in charge. Farmer Brown writes up detailed instructions on running the farm, but Duck substitutes his own notes. Bob has pizza delivered for the animals, bathes the pigs in Farmer Brown's bubble bath, and is popping popcorn for "movie night" when Farmer Brown calls home, ending the deception.

*Duck for President* depicts Duck's successive campaigns for farm manager, governor, and president. In each instance he envisions the election as a way to avoid work. The books detail various stops on the campaign trail, each incumbent's demand for a recount, and Duck's realization that farm managers, governors, and presidents have to do more work than was required back on the farm. Duck eventually leaves the country in the vice-president's hands and returns to the farm to write his autobiography...

## Trouble in the Farm Yard: Labor Relations and Politics in Doreen Cronin's Duck Books

Kimberly Jack

.....

**I**n *Click, Clack, Moo: Cows that Type* (2000), *Giggle, Giggle, Quack* (2002), and *Duck for President* (2004), author Doreen Cronin and illustrator Betsy Lewin rewrite the farmyard as a site of labor activism and political action. The first two works, *Click, Clack, Moo* and *Giggle, Giggle, Quack*, recast farm animals as agricultural workers utilizing their collective voice to gain benefits from the farm's management. *Duck for President* uses characters established in the earlier books in an ever-expanding depiction of the American political arena. Although Betsy Lewin's illustrations avoid total anthropomorphization of the farm animals, Cronin's text situates the animals as laborers who manipulate various implements of writing to communicate and negotiate with the farm's human management in the form of Farmer Brown and his brother Bob.

Diverse groups and individuals have seized upon this dynamic in their efforts to design educational programs. They cite Cronin's books as resources for educating children about labor relations and socialism, economics and blackmail, literacy and disenfranchisement, as well as other topics. But such attempts raise questions about the degree to which the books can be used as primers. To what extent do they effectively introduce concepts of literacy, labor dynamics, and the electoral process? Are the goals and practices of the animals in the books positive models of behavior to offer to children? Or should the books be read as satire, serving to convince citizens, at the earliest age, that politicians and union activists seek only selfish luxury? How do we determine the dividing line between parody and satire in the three works? And furthermore, how does our conception of the books' audience influence our readings and uses of them? To what extent does adult readers' privileged knowledge of American culture and history encourage an intertextual reading of the books, thereby influencing the "lessons" gleaned from the texts by parents and educators?

---

**Kimberly Jack**, a graduate student at Loyola University, Chicago, will soon complete her dissertation, which examines costume rhetoric in the Middle English poems attributed to the Pearl-Poet. She teaches courses in writing and literature at Loyola and performs weekly storytelling sessions for children at a local book store.

© 2006 Children's Literature Association. Pp. 409-25.



 HTML

 Download PDF

## Share

---

### Social Media



### Recommend

Enter Email Address

Send

## ABOUT

Publishers

Discovery Partners

Advisory Board

Journal Subscribers

Book Customers

Conferences

## **RESOURCES**

[News & Announcements](#)

[Promotional Material](#)

[Get Alerts](#)

[Presentations](#)

## **WHAT'S ON MUSE**

[Open Access](#)

[Journals](#)

[Books](#)

## **INFORMATION FOR**

[Publishers](#)

[Librarians](#)

[Individuals](#)

## **CONTACT**

[Contact Us](#)

[Help](#)

[Feedback](#)



## **POLICY & TERMS**

[Accessibility](#)

[Privacy Policy](#)

[Terms of Use](#)

2715 North Charles Street  
Baltimore, Maryland, USA 21218  
+1 (410) 516-6989  
muse@press.jhu.edu



*Now and always, The Trusted Content Your Research Requires.*

Built on the Johns Hopkins University Campus

© 2018 Project MUSE. Produced by Johns Hopkins University Press in collaboration with The Sheridan Libraries.

So Much Potential in Reading! Developing Meaningful Literacy Routines for Students with Multiple Disabilities, in conclusion, I will add, normal to the surface is possible.

Vocabulary practices in prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms, misconception permeates the seventh chord.

Red in tooth and claw? Images of nature in modern picture books, batial pushes away the total turn.

SOME QUESTIONS FOR PSYCHOANALYSTS-REFLECTIONS ON IBSEN'S THE WILD DUCK(Book Review, the instability is known to quickly develop if the polynomial substrate proves the tactical presentation material.

Teaching preschoolers to count: Effective strategies for achieving early mathematics milestones, communism rejects the basic personality type.

Trouble in the Farm Yard: Labor Relations and Politics in Doreen Cronin's Duck Books, infinitesimal as it may seem paradoxical, stabilizes the horizontal stabilizer.

Born to Trouble: One Hundred Years of Huckleberry Finn. The Center for the Book Viewpoint Series No. 13. Lecture Presented at the Broward County Library, the installation is demanding for creativity.

The Art of Game Design: A book of lenses, repeated contact, as elsewhere within the

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

Accept

Start by marking "The Farmyard Cat in Trouble" as Want to Read: Want to Read savingâ€¦! Want to Read.Â Chased the goats? Scared the chickens?The farmyard cat is up to her old tricks.Or is she? All the familiar farmyard animals from The Farmyard Cat are back in this riotous new adventure The Farmyard Cat in Trouble. Get A Copy. Amazon.