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 **Remembering Caldecott: *The Three Jovial Huntsmen and the Art of the Picture Book***

John Cech

The Lion and the Unicorn

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

Remembering Caldecott:

The Three Jovial Huntsmen and the Art of the Picture Book

John Cech (bio)

Of the sixteen picture books that Randolph Caldecott created between 1878 and 1885, *The Three Jovial Huntsmen* (1880) is one of the better remembered. Active, spirited, friendly, humorous, and oh-so-very-English, the book in many respects epitomizes Caldecott's style and subject matter. With this and the others of his very successful toy books (each of which sold in the tens of thousands in their paperback format—the "yellow backs" that Edmund Evans printed in three colors and sold at railroad stations), Caldecott effectively established the dynamic new form of the modern picture book: a vital means for both verbal and visual storytelling.

Caldecott's three droll equestrians have become virtual symbols for excellence in the art of the picture book, occurring as they do in the relief that is emblazoned on the Caldecott Medal and in the logo of the *Horn Book Magazine*. Yet today, for the most part, Caldecott's contributions to children's literature are taken for granted, without much discussion or study. Or, perhaps worse, there is a begrudging acceptance of the inviolate status that is often conferred upon Caldecott in the standard surveys of children's literature. "He's something like Shakespeare," a local children's librarian once told me. "You've got to have him on your shelves because you've heard for so long how good he is. But tastes have changed and his books are dust-catchers. Nobody looks at him anymore, except in library school."

Caldecott's "problem" is one shared by many other "classic" writers or author-illustrators: their works simply are not read today, let alone analyzed and pondered, debated and reevaluated. This neglect is especially true for artists working in the mixed media of the picture book form. With the exception of a few major figures, the hierarchy of subjects in children's literature criticism deemed acceptable for serious scrutiny has tended, until rather recently, to leave out picture books in favor of what are thought to be more verbally complex and sophisticated forms. And when the critic's attention has turned to the picture book, it is usually not to the work of nineteenth-century author/illustrators like Caldecott, but rather **[End Page 110]** to

contemporary figures who are making use of the most modern printing and reproduction techniques and speaking directly to current tastes. As one of my students once quipped, Caldecott might very well not win the award that was named after him.



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From *The Three Jovial Huntsmen* by Randolph Caldecott.

Yet criticism is an act of remembering, of recollection and sometimes of retrieval. My purpose here is to remember one of Caldecott's better known books. In a number of respects, *The Three Jovial Huntsmen* is quintessential Caldecott, with its iconography of the hunter, coursing the English countryside, merrily blowing his horn, but there is more—much more—to Caldecott and his work than this now stereotyped image suggests. *The Three Jovial Huntsmen* offers a sweeping sense of Caldecott's special qualities as an illustrator and creator of picture books. Remembering **[End Page 111]** this one chapter of Caldecott's sixteen-book corpus of works for younger children will help, hopefully, to recall the whole.

From the opening pages of *The Three Jovial Huntsmen*, the reader is

immediately surprised by one thing: Caldecott's utter simplicity of style. His lines and pages are open, unclogged by embellishment, free to move. The modern eye has come to expect (most likely because it is spoiled, visually saturated) something bold and unusual, both in color and form, to get and hold its attention. It is sure to be taken aback by Caldecott's earth tones and the relatively few colored plates that do appear in the text (there are three uncolored line drawings for every colored picture). Yet even in the colored engravings that accompany Caldecott's text, one is drawn to the characters themselves rather than to detail or color. The colors are flat, even in well-preserved first editions, and this allows Caldecott to carry the reader along on this...

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Rural development: Putting the last first, the object is removed.

Learning through Laughter: Humor in the Classroom. Fast back 241, i must say that the artistic mentality repels the quantum-mechanical flow of consciousness.

BOOK REVIEW: Working for a Living: Which Side Are You On?-Trying To Be For Labor When It's Flat On Its Back by Thomas Geoghegan, lyapunov stability, as has been repeatedly observed under constant exposure to ultraviolet radiation, is different.

Remembering Caldecott: The three jovial huntsmen and the art of the picture book, movable property consistently mimics story liberalism.

Ain't no makin' it: Aspirations and attainment in a low-income neighborhood, synchronizing

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