“What is the use of a book without pictures and conversations?”: the Role of Illustrations in Lewis Carroll’s *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

**Abstract**

For my project in the Newberry Seminar, I examined the degree of anthropomorphism in the illustrations by John Tenniel, John R. Neill, Mervyn Peake, and Ralph Steadman for Lewis Carroll’s novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*. I used the texts of *Alice* found at the Newberry Library to examine the illustrations as they appeared in each edition of the book. Each of these four illustrators followed the text’s progression of the animals becoming more animal-like—less anthropomorphic—through the story, until the end when the dream fades back into reality and the animal characters have become fully animal. While most illustrators followed this progression, there are striking differences among the four. Due to the copyright expiring just before publication, Neill and his publisher were able to take liberties with the story. They dramatically changed the illustrations and abridged the text to a couple chapters, as well as simplified the text’s language to make the story more understandable for younger children. While Tenniel de-anthropomorphized his characters at the book’s close by removing their clothes, Mervyn Peake removed his characters’ anthropomorphic qualities by physically cutting off his characters’ bodies and illustrating only their heads. Finally, Ralph Steadman’s animals look like animals, but their body language is like that of humans. Like Tenniel, he removed his characters’ clothing at the story’s end, returning the animals to their basest animal form. Additionally, he restored them to standing on four legs, rather than upright on two. Thus, I found the degree and portrayal of anthropomorphism in the illustrations of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* differs dramatically between illustrators. In turn, this affects the audience’s reading and understanding of the story.