Lay audiences of the late nineteenth century saw two very different visions of insects: soon after Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel published the smoking caterpillar and the bread-and-butter-fly of *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* (Figs. 1 and 2), Jean-Henri Fabre enlivened and popularized the science of entomology. These two visions of insects—one imaginary, the other experimental and observational—emerged during a century in which insect collecting was an especially popular activity, and Romantic artists beginning with Francisco de Goya drew bizarre composite creatures. *Alice in Wonderland* is but one of many nineteenth-century examples of strange, decidedly unscientific illustrations of insects.

J.J. Grandville and Martin Disteli, two early to mid-century caricaturists, were among the few artists that Charles Hogue mentioned in his article “Cultural Entomology” (1987). These two caricaturists lacked a scientific background, but both drew dozens of “bugfolk” (Hogue 1979) and improved their knowledge of entomology through time. Their contemporary, the author-illustrator L.M. Budgen, also put insects in human situations, though not as a caricaturist, but as an educator. Budgen drew insects with a far more scientific eye than Grandville or Disteli (or Tenniel), portraying some insects in their natural settings and others in whimsical situations. Budgen’s *Episodes of Insect Life* aimed to inspire a new generation of amateur entomologists. The illustrations fully incorporate two entomological tendencies of nineteenth-century popular media: widespread enthusiasm for science, and absurd juxtapositions. Budgen is unique among nineteenth-century illustrators for having rendered insects scientifically, while occasionally venturing to place them into unexpected settings worthy of Grandville or Tenniel.

Art historians have long suspected that J.J. Grandville, who had a deep interest in both insects and dreamlike imagery, exerted a strong influence on Tenniel (Mespoulet 1934). Grandville began his career as a political caricaturist and later worked as...
a book illustrator; he did not finish high school, and had little to no educational background in the sciences (Getty 2010). Grandville’s art insulted his social and political targets by comparing them to inanimate and animate objects, including insects; these bugfolk are not anthropomorphized insects, but ento-morphized humans whose buglike transformations reveal their various shortcomings (Fig. 3).

Toward the end of his career, Grandville published his masterpiece, Another World, which featured many insect-vertebrate composites (Fig. 4). His penultimate publication, The Animated Flowers, showed insects and other animals in a positive light as loyal attendees to beautiful flowers (Fig. 5). Through the course of his career, Grandville came to view insects favorably and found himself interested in their natural history.

Many of Grandville’s works were published outside of France, and he undoubtedly exerted a strong influence over Disteli (Kaenel 2000), and probably influenced Budgen as well. Grandville died in 1847. A year later, Budgen published the first volume of Episodes of Insect Life. In a sense, Budgen’s illustrations picked up where Grandville’s left off, with delightful scenes of insects and their floral companions. Unlike Grandville’s first publications, Grandville was French; Budgen was British. In the Cuvier-Geoffroy debate, Grandville sided with Geoffroy, whereas Budgen ignored him. Grandville drew everything, from insects to lions to inanimate objects; Budgen focused almost exclusively on insects. Grandville ran afoul of censors with an early anticlerical caricature; Budgen dedicated the Episodes to a local pastor. Contemporary scholars treat the two artists very differently: Grandville, though far from a household name, has been the subject of numerous books, articles, and theses (including my own), while scholars have paid remarkably little attention to Budgen. Lastly, Grandville was a man, and Budgen was a woman.

Scholars today know little about L.M. Budgen, who published under the pseudonym Acheta domestica. Budgen’s prose and illustrations show that she was familiar with many aspects of the natural history of insects. Her writing switches between scientific, with minute detail and passive voice, and literary, with poetic apostrophe and other devices. Usually, she began each episode with a scientific illustration of insects in their natural habitats, and ended the episode with a charming, whimsical scene featuring anthropomorphized bugfolk. She identified all of the species she illustrated using binomial nomenclature. Scientific, non-anthropomorphized insects are often portrayed in a taxonomically useful dorsal view; though the leaves in the background may turn, twist, and fold, the insects pose stiffly, directly parallel to the viewer, like a specimen in a drawer (Fig. 6). In one scene where, like Grandville, Budgen folded insect wings down to cover the abdomen like a skirt, the butterflies’ mouthparts are prominently rendered (Fig. 7). As an advocate for insects, Budgen even suggested keeping...
them as pets (Fig. 8). The general tone of the first volume of *Episodes of Insect Life* is similar to that Grandville’s early work, filled with lighthearted humor.

In the second volume of *Episodes*, some illustrations become slightly less quaint: The reader gets a spider’s-eye view of a terrified woman (Fig. 9). The third and final volume contains more strange and unexpected illustrations. To be sure, most scenes in this volume continue to portray insects as before and are nearly indistinguishable from the scenes in the first volume. But in a few illustrations, toward the end of the book, insects act in unnatural, metaphorical, even Boschian ways, disconnected from their natural history (Fig. 10). In one particularly Grandvill-esque illustration, Budgen takes on the themes of prayer and idolatry (Fig. 11). Even a scene that advocates for insects is more direct—rather than patiently waiting in a meadow for humans to come and domesticate them, these social creatures have taken to the streets (Fig. 12).

In the humanities, recent scholarship on Budgen has compared her insects to fairies. A musicologist believes that Budgen’s insects’ appearance makes them fairy-like, as Budgen dresses them as sirens, knights, and sylphs using cloaks, coats of mail, and wands (Brittan 2011). A competing interpretation from a rather entomophobic literary historian states that Budgen’s illustrations do not capture the fairy-like insect world that she sees; rather, she imposes these flighty, fanciful qualities on the dark and dangerous natural world revealed by science (Bown 2001). At the heart of this disagreement lies the question of whether the fairy-like aspects of Budgen’s illustrations represent an interpretation or a fear of science, and whether she truly saw the world of insects as happy and magical, or had set out “to disguise the nastiness of the natural world and make it more lovable” (Bown 2001).

The fanciful, metaphorical, bizarre, and humorous qualities of Budgen’s illustrations and text clearly demonstrate that she did not see herself as a scientist. And yet, the *Episodes* sprang from her desire to promote the science of entomology. She introduced her work by calling entomology “a powerful Genie; a light-winged Fairy...our darling pursuit,” and said that she “endeavored to associate [insects] as much as possible with our domestic habits” as part of her “gentle warfare against [anti-insect] prejudice.” Budgen’s illustrations are far more detailed than those of earlier entomologically-inspired works, such as William Roscoe’s *The Butterfly’s Ball and the Grasshopper’s Feast* (Fig. 13), as well as the illustrations of her contemporaries Grandville and Disteli. The unscientific aspects of Budgen’s work therefore derive from her goal of engaging the lay public.

A few years after the *Episodes*, Jules Michelet also wrote popular entomology
by going beyond strictly rational description in *L ‘insecte* (1858). Michelet’s work often began even more scientifically than Budgen’s, with precise observations that he made using a microscope. His accounts of insects consistently lead to Proust-like musings on life, death, love, family, transformation, and other lofty themes. Giacomelli’s gorgeous illustrations in later editions of *L ‘insecte* reflect the beauty and transcendence of Michelet’s writing, but do not stray into metaphor as the text does (Fig. 14). The expressively arranged, lovingly rendered insects give little hint of the Shakespearian and other anthropomorphic comparisons in the text. Louis Figuier’s *Les Insectes* of 1869 anthropomorphizes insects in a similar vein. The book contains hundreds of illustrations, which are far less fantastic than Giacomelli’s. Many illustrations are truly scientific, with isolated or compared taxonomic characters; full-page plates show insects in their natural habitats. A disconnect therefore exists between the text and the illustrations. Lastly, Fabre, often called the “father of entomology,” published through the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, but his books contained either no illustrations at all, or a sparse selection of straightforward photographs and drawings.

The tale of nineteenth-century entomology is a story of discovery and debate, both enlightening and disconcerting. Pierre André Latreille’s classification of the Insecta contributed to the Cuvier-Geoffroy debates, which were never entirely resolved (Appel 1987). As the century progressed, Fabré and countless others continued to study all aspects of insect life, from the microscopic to the behavioral. The graphic arts provide a delightful record of entomological progress and the public’s understanding of insects. In the early nineteenth century, the caricaturists J.J. Grandville and Martin Disteli first conflated insects with their political targets, but drew increasingly accurate and detailed insects as their careers progressed. Later in the century, academics such as Michelet and Figuier were drawn in the opposite direction: beginning with rational observations and a strong educational background, they soon found themselves lost in the wonder of the insect world, imposing human and supernatural narratives on their insects. These disparate historical figures all shared a trajectory toward the fantastic and bizarre, showing that nineteenth-century graphic arts lay at the crossroads of modern scientific inquiry and medieval fantasy. The under-appreciated L.M. Budgen is of particular interest for this area of study because her illustrated insects, unlike Michelet’s, reflected the strange fantasies of the text; unlike Figuier’s, they were always shown whole, in their (natural or intentionally bizarre) habitats; and, unlike Grandville and Distelli’s, they were always rendered as accurately as possible, given their strange settings. Because she both wrote and illustrated her books, in addition to combining romantic and rational tendencies, Budgen deserves greater recognition from entomologists and historians alike.

Many more bizarre insects were drawn in the nineteenth century than could possibly be discussed here. Some artists, such as Grandville and Tenniel, remained influential in the twentieth century (Getty 2008; Brooker 2004). Others now languish in obscurity. This need not be the case: graphic artists meant for their work to be reproduced, and the publications mentioned here are now freely available through the Biodiversity Heritage Library, Project Gutenberg, Archive, Google Books, Gallica, and other sources. These strange creatures can inform the history of science, and provoke, interest, and delight entomologists of all ages.

**Acknowledgements**

I would like to thank June Hargrove for her advice and encouragement, as well as Mattias Forslage and Richard Brown for valuable feedback on the content of this manuscript. All figures are from works in the public domain, and are available online at Google Books (Figs. 1-9, 11-12, 14), the Biodiversity Heritage Library (Fig. 10), and Project Gutenberg (Fig. 13).

**Literature Cited**


**S.R. Schachat** holds a degree in Art History from the University of Maryland, and is currently a Graduate Research Fellow at Mississippi State University and a Research Student at the Smithsonian Institution.