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Bugs in Books

Abstract: This article traces the frequent appearance of winged insects as subjects of poetry and painting in the nineteenth-century manuscript album in Britain and America. The bugs that were painted at life-size and sometimes pasted into these blank books invite beholders to rethink the relationship between object and image, and specimen and illustration. Developed at a moment when the modern division between ephemera and durable print was being consolidated, this insect theme can also tell us about the understandings of time and preservation that shaped the album. Insects were resources that album-makers used to develop a kind of book theory.

1 Introduction

The title of this essay should not be taken altogether literally. The topic here is *not* those entomological 'enemies of books' to which the typographer and bibliophile William Blades devoted two book chapters in 1888: not the book worms and other vermin that insert themselves inside our libraries and our books and menace the paper legacies that human beings inherit from the past (a menace that compounds the risks already posed, according to Blades's other chapters, by fire, water, dust, and 'servants and children').[1] Instead, this essay surveys an array of the tiny, winged insects that, with remarkable frequency, were represented verbally and pictorially in British and American friendship albums between about 1790 and 1850. It engages, that is, with the bugs in the poems and pictures that were donated to album pages—and not with the beetles, moths, and ant larvae that cause sleepless nights for librarians and conservators while, chewing through books' bindings and pages or feeding on the mold and fungi that grow between books' covers, they call into question books' vaunted powers to withstand time and transmit cultural meaning to posterity. And yet, as we will see, there are connections to be forged between albums' entomological themes and the particular

1 See Blades 1888; and for a discussion of the way that confusion between literal and figurative meanings has haunted discussion of book worms, registering how throughout the early history of entomology they kept escaping the naturalist's gaze, see Favret and Ross 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111321462-005

way that the people who contribute to them engaged, sometimes explicitly, the preservative power and the temporal orientation of their bookish medium.

This essay investigates how—and, more speculatively, why—insects, especially though not exclusively, butterflies and moths, came to be a conventional part of the poetic and artistic content that filled up amateur albums during the Romantic period. These manuscript books, curated by one person or two persons, but often crowd-sourced so that an entire social circle contributed to the filling up of their pages, are sites of a remarkable and often overwhelming miscellaneity. An incomplete inventory of what one finds in the albums from this period might include: records of study that bespeak how much these books inherit from the older tradition of the commonplace book; autographs (specimens of the hand writing of celebrities, revered traces of a moment when these people were physically in the presence of the page) that bespeak how these books also inherit from—while they feminize—the tradition of the *album amicorum*; riddles and rebuses inscribed onto the pages, included as prompts to witty conversation when the album was pored over in the drawing room; original poetry, often dedicated chivalrously to the book's female owner; already-published poetry copied out by hand over again onto the pages, sometimes with attribution to the original author, but sometimes not; sheet music, sometimes composed for the book's owner; scissored-out slips and scraps of newsprint relaying humorous anecdotes and snippets of verse; flower paintings and landscape sketches in pencil, pen, watercolour, and gouache; fabric scraps, ribbons, and wreaths of hair; pasted in tickets, funeral cards, and letters; specimens of pressed flowers and dried sea weed that demonstrate how often the era's albums did double duty as florilegia and as proofs of natural history study.[2]

As that motley list will have suggested, one reason that the miniscule two-letter preposition 'in' centring the title 'Bugs in Books' might require analysis itself and itself be rich with complexity is that the album is a book type that has *contents* in a more literal sense of that term than usual. Things can be 'in' these books in as much as the books also serve as things that hold other things—serve as receptacles, as file folders or perhaps, as will be suggested here, as specimen cabinets.

The method that this essay adopts for navigating the nineteenth-century manuscript album's extraordinary diversity of content and of media is to confine discussion to a single, buggy theme. But, as I have intimated in remarking on the double meaning that 'in' can take on when one references the bugs in books,

2 The critical literature on the Romantic-era album has multiplied in recent years: for recent examples see Cheng 2021; Matthews 2020; Eckert 2018; and Lynch 2018.

while in this essay I follow this insect trail, I will be connecting throughout the histories of entomological science and of the manuscript book.

Nineteenth-century album-makers find bugs good not only to paint and to write about, but also good to think with. To me they seem to be eager to leverage the ways in which, since the mid-eighteenth century, insects had served as the conceptual resources for a kind of book theory. Insects could do this conceptual work in part because they had long been the conventional symbols of human life's transience. The seventeenth-century English writer John Bunyan, for example, wrote in one of his poems for children, 'Of the Boy and Butter Fly,' 'The Butter-fly doth represent to me/ The Worlds best things at best but fading be.'[3] Butterflies had been regularly included—along with other objects whose beauty is fated to fade or which have a precarious hold on life—in still life paintings on *vanitas* themes.[4] Over the course of the eighteenth century, however, as compilers of albums appear to have noticed, entomological discussion had been pressed into a new sort of service as part of the effort to order and taxonomize the world of print. Accordingly, and as we will see, insects—fluttering butterflies and moths especially—could serve as the mascots for album-makers' effort to position their book-type in a privileged relation to materials that were fugitive, volatile, and ephemeral.

2 Insect arts and Romantic-era albums

One source that a historian of the book can draw on for reconstructing the protocols at play in the assembly of the Romantic-period manuscript album is a piece of satiric short fiction that appeared in London in 1831, in a published and printed book: a first-person narrative titled 'The Adventures of an Album,' anthologised in Louisa Henrietta Sheridan's *The Comic Offering; or, Ladies' Melange of Literary Mirth*. In this tale, a book—initially blank, but from the story's start magically endowed with a voice that enables it to remember and recount its experiences—narrates the adventures that befell it as it circulated from household to household to be filled up. The eponymous album undertakes that narrating in a rather cynical spirit, generally finding that the amateurs who have supplied its contents

3 Bunyan 1686, 28.

4 A splendid example, which brings a manuscript book and a Red Admiral butterfly into conjunction, is furnished by Maria van Oosterwijck's 1668 painting 'Vanitas with Flowers and Globe' (Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum, Gemäldegalerie, 5714 <https://www.khm.at/de/object/1370/>).

have few talents and little appreciation of artistic originality. This object spies on the households to which it is admitted, using its inside knowledge to reveal that for the most part people have plagiarised the poems and pictures they have inscribed on its pages. It depicts people mindlessly contributing to the album merely the materials people are expected to contribute to the album—sentimental clichés, jokes that, too often repeated, have gone stale. That conventionality is instanced in one episode early in the talking album's history in which it falls into the hands of a family who are convinced that the book's owner 'does not know or care what is in the book, which she only keeps for fashion's sake': thus excusing themselves for doing the minimum, these people copy into its pages a song by the popular poet Thomas Moore and then, to ornament those verses, paste in some pictorial materials, including an image of a butterfly.[5] The butterfly is there, faute de mieux, as place-holder for the more thoughtful, meaningful contribution the ill-fated album does not receive.

We would not be wrong to imagine that the imaginary album-narrator at the centre of 'Adventures of an Album' would have acquired over the course of its filling up pages resembling the one pictured in Fig. 1, which images a page from an album, assembled around 1828, that is in my own collection. Here we have combined, artlessly, in a single pictorial plane—and to rather surreal effect—a pen-and-ink sketch of the work of laundry day; two rebuses or word puzzles, on the left-hand side; three riddles scattered across the page (one in French), one of the English ones inscribed on a scroll with a floral border. We also have—and these rather more accomplished sections of the image attract the eye as soon one arrives at the page—a painting of a moss rose and perched atop that bit of flower painting a butterfly seen in profile, with richly hued wings in purple, blue, white, and rose. It is matched by the rather dowdier mayfly or moth in the bottom left-hand corner of the page. The jarring, teeming miscellaneity of the page epitomizes the miscellaneity both of this volume and of the album as book type.

Amidst the album's motley mix, brightly coloured, hand-painted butterflies were favourite ornaments. Their perennial popularity had several sources. Late in the period that this essay treats, silk-bound, pith-paper albums composed entirely of pages of brightly coloured (if scientifically inaccurate) water-colour pictures of butterflies were standard wares for the export trade linking Chinese workshops to so-called Oriental bazaars in Britain and America. In 1834 the American importers of 'fancy goods,' Nathaniel and Frederick Carne were, for instance, able to purchase in Canton one hundred albums, bought for twelve dollars total,

5 Anonymous 1831, 268.

Fig. 1: A medley in an anonymous album. Author's collection, *c.* 1828.

and then turn a pretty profit when they auctioned them off for a dollar each in New York: we can imagine these albums, which might also include pictures of fruit, or flowers, or pagodas, taking their place alongside other exotic bric-à-brac objects—aquariums stocked with tropical fish and chinaware printed with scenes

from the Arabian Nights—that had become the props for the escapist dream-work, the 'phantasmagorias of the interior,' that unfolded in the Victorian parlour.[6] This Chinese export art inspired multiple imitations by Western amateurs, who often used as material support for their art works the same pith paper used in Chinese workshops—since this paper, too, (then known as rice paper) had become a staple of the China trade.[7]

There are other explanations for the butterfly's ubiquity across the album's pages. Since the eighteenth century, albums had been used to showcase the fruits of the lessons in drawing and painting that were during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries requisite parts of young women's polite education in Britain and America, artistic schooling they obtained through tutors or the how-to books that were increasingly available in this era.[8] As subjects for contributions to the album, butterflies seem to have been almost as favoured as flowers.[9] A favourite conceit of Romantic poets like Thomas Moore was that colourful insects *were* flying flowers: in a description of the Vale of Cashmere [sic] found in his 'oriental romance' *Lalla Rookh* (1817), those who behold the 'rainbow butterflies' are said to 'fancy the rich flowers/ That round them in the sun lay sighing/ Had been by magic all set flying.'[10]

Moore also appended to *Lalla Rookh* a note explaining that 'in the Malay language, the same word signifies women and flowers': Theresa M. Kelley, who cites Moore, reminds us that the woman in this era who laboured as artist or botanist or poet was, while she did that work, under pressure to be as ornamental as flowers herself.[11] Women were also, of course, linked to butterflies. An extended simile from Lord Byron's 1809 poem *The Giaour* connects the sad fate of the butterfly to the sad fate of the beautiful girl, each the victim of a male pursuer:[12]

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6 Haddad 2008, location 116. On 'phantasmagorias of the interior,' see Benjamin 2002, 9.

7 See Krüger 2019; Clunas 1984.

8 See Bermingham 2000.

9 Butterflies were favoured too as subjects to be depicted in women's needlework, another female activity that overlapped with the pursuit of natural science. In *The Papilios of Great Britain* (1795), the lepidopterist William Lewin stated that he owed his knowledge of the butterfly called the Bath white to a piece of needlework executed by a young lady from Bath who had modelled her handicraft on a specimen that had been taken near that place (cited in Salmon with Marren and Harley 2000, 271).

10 Moore 1852, 268.

11 Kelley 2012, 92. See also King 2003, for a cultural history of the blooming girl, a figure positioned at the intersection of the nineteenth-century courtship novel and contemporary botanical science.

12 Byron, *Byron*, ed. McGann, 1986, 218, ll. 404–407.

The lovely toy so fiercely sought
Hath lost its charm by being caught,
For every touch that wooed its stay
Hath brushed its brightest hues away.

Like blossoms, butterflies were subjects that, while lending themselves to this moralizing about time, mortality, the vanity of worldly things, and the fragility of female bloom, also efficiently showed off an artist's mastery of colour.[13] In fact, butterflies were often written about as though they were colour itself, colour incarnate and animated. Popular natural histories of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries made much of the pigmentation of butterfly wings. Naturalist historians waxed poetic, or mined the published works of the poets (Lord Byron included), to stress the evanescence of the insects' beautiful colours, which were rubbed off all too easily by rough-handling. Their hues proved, that is, as fugitive and prone to fading as the water colour paints that might be used to paint them. These associations are set out on a page in an album compiled by a certain Elizabeth Reynolds around 1817, atop which Reynolds or a member of her circle has combined cut-outs (on pith paper, I suspect) of four butterflies, which are positioned atop the page, where they surround a pasted-in pressed flower, the latter surviving now only as desiccated remnants. Below the pictured insects and the real flower are handwritten transcriptions of three poetic excerpts: the lines from *Lalla Rookh*'s description of the Vale of Cashmere that I quoted earlier; a section of the lepidopterous simile from Byron's *The Giaour*; and six lines from an older but much reprinted poem, Moses Browne's 1739 *Essay on the Universe* (a physico-theological staple of natural-history teaching through the nineteenth century).[14] The latter excerpt begins by citing Browne's observation, found in the midst of a poetic catalogue of many insect species and tucked between the gnat and the spider, that 'In down of ev'ry variegated dye,/ Shines flutt'ring soft the gaudy butterfly'; Browne continues with the admonition to the would-be butterfly hunter that 'That powder which thy spoiling hand disdains/ The forms of quills and painted plumes contains.'[15] The conceit of that couplet—the proposal that when seen through the poet's microscopic lens the scales on the butterfly's wings will be revealed not simply as feathers but as feathers already taking the form of quill

13 The pith paper that stationers took to marketing to album makers in particular from about 1800 on was prized by amateur artists because on this ground colours seemed to shine brighter: see Krüger 2019, 2.

14 Manchester, Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections Museum, Sir Harry Page Collection, album no. 178.

15 Browne 1753, 99.

pens—works to reinforce the insect's association with representation. In these lines the butterfly is represented as anticipating its own imaging.

An album now at the Library Company of Philadelphia, kept between 1833 and 1856 by Amy Matilda Cassey, a member of Philadelphia's free African-American community, provides an interesting angle on the floral and entomological ornaments that amateur artists supplied for their friends' albums. Curators have found that at least one of the watercolour and gouache images signed here by Sarah Douglass Mapps (1806–1882), a writer for the abolitionist paper *The Liberator*, Amy Matilda Cassey's friend and likely at one time her teacher too, was copied straight out of the pages of a how-to manual: a fuchsia from James Andrews's 1836 *Lessons in Flower Painting: A Series of Easy and Progressive Studies, Drawn and Coloured after Nature* reappears with Mapps's signature in the Cassey album. The artistic conventionality of this album and others from 1830s Black Philadelphia, has made the volumes more of a site for disappointment than one for discoveries for the scholars of African-American culture who open these volumes hoping to find proofs of Black individuality and emancipation.[16] And yet there may be reasons to make an exception for the butterfly page that Mapps donated to Cassey's album and think about how it might intervene into the association between the butterfly and colour itself (Fig. 2).

The butterfly Mapps depicts, likely a swallowtail, is black: the inscription at the bottom of the page, 'A token of love from me to thee,' might even justify our considering the picture as a form of self-representation.[17] It is as though Mapp is deliberately recalibrating both the prevailing aesthetics of album culture, in which by convention a beautiful woman is gifted a collection of beauties, and the racialized politics of colour that conditioned that aesthetics.

16 See Rusert 2015. Some scholars seem to have adopted the attitude of the author and activist Frederick Douglass, who when he contributed to Cassey's album in 1850, chose to register his discomfort over having to transfer his words into that ostentatiously pretty and feminine context: 'I never feel more entirely out of my sphere than when presuming to write in an Album. Its suggestion of beauty elegance and refinements—whilst my habits of life passed history & present occupation have called into exercise all the sterner qualities of my head and heart—so that I walk upon uneven uncultivated and stony ground—gazing upon huge rocks with far more pleasure than I experience while promenading the most richly cultivated garden and gazing upon the most luxurious flowers' (Philadelphia, The Library Company of Philadelphia, P.9764.2; album of Amy Matilda Cassey).

17 Philadelphia, The Library Company of Philadelphia, P.9764.2; album of Amy Matilda Cassey.

3 Bug-keeping and book-keeping

Further manifesting the book type's commitment to miscellaneity, album pages could also showcase and record individuals' studies in natural history. In an album assembled by the Reverend Hubert Thomas Parker and his family in the 1820s (now in the Pforzheimer Collection of the New York Public Library), one finds, for instance, a page imaging the life cycle of the 'large black water-beetle,' or dytiscus (depicted throughout at a magnified, larger-than-life scale, see Fig. 3): employing the diagrammatic style favoured in contemporary works of natural science, using watercolour and ink, the creator of these images traces the insect's growth from egg (number 1) to 'larva or caterpillar' (2, given in two views), to pupa (3), to the 'imago or perfect state' (4, pictured twice, from above and from below).[18]

Another page of watercolour, in a more naturalistic idiom, found later in the album, pictures dragonflies beside a grassy bank, depicting them in various stages of development, some fluttering, some crawling. A third page is devoted to the nettle butterfly, shown as caterpillar, chrysalis, and fly, all three stages perched atop this insect's food source. Within the jumble of the Parker album, these metamorphosizing insects are to be encountered amongst pages of extracted verse and landscape scenes, along with a portrait of Lord Byron and a transcription from the *Edinburgh Review* of passages from a history of the rise of Napoleon.

The album mode's absorption of amateur entomology was facilitated by the fact that natural history in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was so very paper-centred an enterprise, and because it was all but explicit that the aim of this enterprise was to subordinate nature's plenty to the tabular, classificatory order of the codex book. Would-be collectors of insects aiming to preserve their trophies were instructed, for example, to put butterflies as soon as possible into 'your Pocket Book, or any other small printed book, . . . after the same manner as your dry plants.'[19] (The passage is by the British naturalist James Petiver, writing in 1695, but the same advice about encasing in one's library volumes the objects one has obtained through fieldwork continued to be tendered almost a century later, in books such as *The Naturalist's and Traveller's Companion Containing Instructions for Discovering and Preserving Objects of Natural History* [1772, 2nd edn 1774].) Nineteenth-century butterfly boxes were 'often designed to imitate

18 New York, New York Public Library, Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, Pforz BND-MSS (Parker, H. T.).

19 *Musei Petiveriani*, quoted in McCracken Peck 2003, 28.

Fig. 2 (left): Sarah Douglass Mapps' tribute to Amy Matilda Cassey. Amy Matilda Cassey album, 1833. Philadelphia, The Library Company of Philadelphia, P.9764.2.
Fig. 3 (right): Ink and watercolour illustrations of four stages of the development of the water-beetle. Hubert Thomas Parker scrapbook album, *c.* 1820–1831. New York, New York Public Library, Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, Pforz BND-MSS (Parker, H. T.).

leather-bound books and were intended to be stacked [like books] on shelves.'[20] In the 1850s, the American artist-naturalist Titian Ramsay Peale encased his lepidopteral collection in specimen boxes like these, which he had custom-made so that, like books, they would have cloth bindings, marbled end papers, and gilded letters stamped on the spines, the parts that would be visible when the tin boxes were stacked on his bookshelves.[21]

The page was the destined point of terminus for the butterfly, moth, or gnat that had been claimed for natural science and put on display as a specimen. Since books could come in handy during the entomologist's fieldwork, as containers for gathering up insects, as Petiver found in the seventeenth century, the page also represented the material instrument of the decontextualization that removed that insect from its original habitat and transformed it into a specimen.[22] (That act of decontextualization is exactly what is made visible by all the white space on the page that the Parker family devotes to the four avatars of the water beetle.)

In *The Insect and the Image* the art historian Janice Neri outlines how insects were central to what she describes as the specimen logic of natural history: a term she coins to designate both a technical dimension of early modern books of natural history—'the visual technique of presenting an isolated object against a blank background' (as captured by Fig. 3)—and their epistemic presuppositions—their 'way of understanding the material world as a succession of isolated objects.'[23] From the seventeenth century on, she explains, insects were pivotal for an emerging understanding of nature as a collection of discrete, separable, collectable, numerable things—an understanding which privileged 'those creatures and items that can be depicted or displayed as objects [as insects can be], those [creatures and items] that possess cleanly defined edges or contours and whose surfaces are visually distinct.'[24]

Neri also observes that, because it is a simple matter for an artist to create life-sized depictions that preserve insects' actual physical dimensions, the boundary between insect *illustrations* and insect *specimens* has often been unstable, an instability that book-makers (of both printed and manuscript volumes) have cul-

20 Salmon with Marren and Harley 2000, 80.

21 Foutch 2018, 177.

22 As Bruno Latour outlined in his influential discussion of inscription systems and immutable mobiles, paper was the instrument par excellence by which non-European nature was made portable in the early modern period, made into something that Europeans across the globe could gather up, accommodate to the long-distance circuitry of global exchange, and relocate to the metropole (Latour 1990).

23 Neri 2011, XII–XIII.

24 Neri 2011, XXI.

tivated. The reader who encounters, for instance, the frontispiece of John Coakley Lettsom's *The Naturalist's and Traveller's Companion*, preparatory to actually reading the book and learning from it how to preserve 'objects of natural history,' is supposed to hesitate and to wonder whether she is looking at painted insects or real ones—ones that have either settled by chance on the page's surface or been pinned to it by the zealous hand of a collector (see Fig. 4).

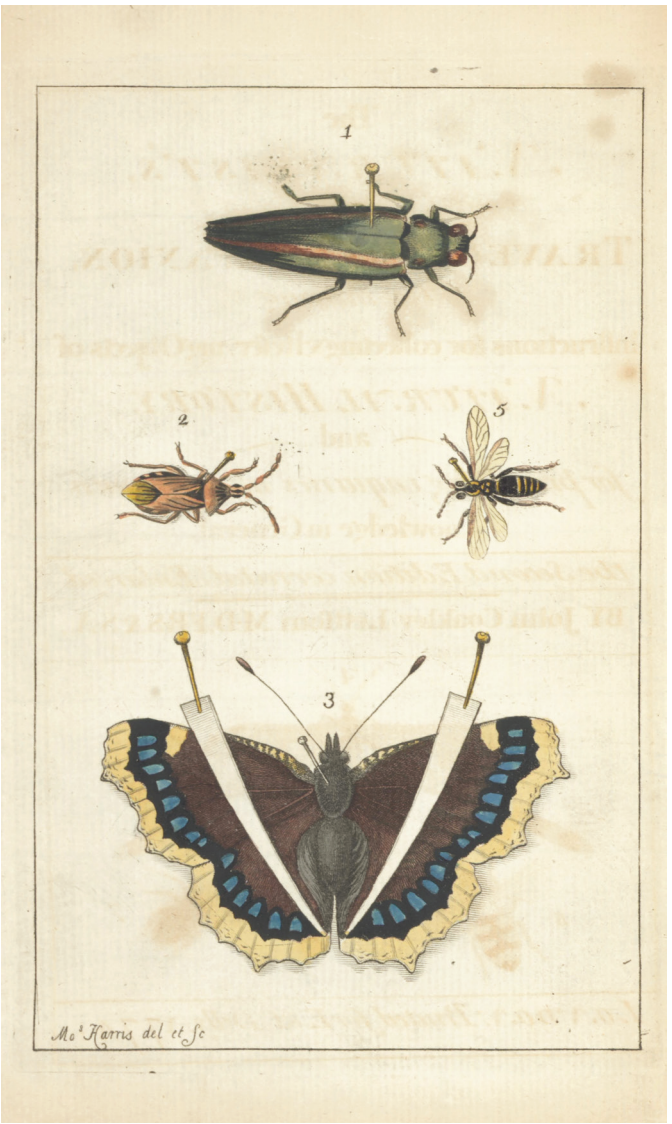

Fig. 4: Frontispiece in John Coakley Lettsom, *The Naturalist's and Traveller's Companion*, 2nd edn, London, 1774. Notice the artist Moses Harris's use of shading to create the illusion of a third dimension.

Contributors to Romantic-era albums often indulged in similar trompe-l'oeil effects. They played on the possibility that a representation of an insect that has been painted at life-size into a book might prove very nearly identical visually to an actual insect that has invaded and then been trapped within a book, as it might prove nearly identical, too, to a real insect *specimen* that has been preserved within a book. The suggestion of a shadow added below the mid-section of an insect that had been painted onto the page could contribute to the illusion that a gnat as big as (or as small as) life did not so much belong to the world of the book, as to the world of the viewer. In this context, the insect regularly moves across the ontological boundary between two-dimensional image and three-dimensional object. With that movement, it literalizes the idea that there are contents *in* the book. In fact, there is in the Anne Wagner friendship album (now in the Pforzheimer Collection of the New York Public Library) a page atop which Wagner's friend or relative C.H.W. has pasted an actual, though squashed, gnat: real food provided for a painted swan (see Fig. 5).

In 1824 the poet Thomas Maude reported on that mobility and the effects it engendered in the observer in a short poem titled 'Lines Written in an Album, on the Blank Page Opposite a Beautiful Painting of a Butterfly.' Despite the title, for the whole of the poem, the speaker denies that he beholds a painting at all.

Fig. 5: Page with painted swan and coral piece and actual tiny insect pasted in. Anne Wagner album, titled 'Memorials of Friendship', *c.* 1795–1834. New York, New York Public Library, Carl H. Pforzheimer Collection of Shelley and his Circle, Pforz BND-MSS (Wagner, A.).

Instead, he addresses himself to the butterfly, 'poor silken thing!,' that lies outstretched within the album's 'leaves,' and asks the insect whether 'Eliza' took 'your freedom and life away.' In the poem's final stanza, the speaker shifts addressee and talks to himself: 'Surely my eye is not deceived?/ The microscope must be believed—/ It *is* a butterfly!' A note at the end of Maude's volume defends this homage to the artist's mimetic skill and powers of illusion:[25]

> Possibly the reader may consider this as a complimentary exaggeration; but it is not so. The butterfly in question is painted on rice paper, and is so finely done, that the application of a microscope only renders the illusion greater.

His compliment collapses the distance between artistic representation understood as a transformation of the natural object and artistic representation understood as the transposition of that object.

4 Entomological book theory

There is an additional way in which the entomological and the bibliographical intersect in the nineteenth century's manuscript albums. In 1751 the essayist and lexicographer Samuel Johnson had, in the course of a periodical essay series, *The Rambler*, that he was having printed off biweekly in the form of two-penny sheets, described what he called 'the papers of the day' as 'the ephemerae of learning.' With that analogy, Johnson connected certain sorts of texts—those that were cheap, transient, destined to be disposed of, and therefore left precariously unbound—with insects, such as the mayflies, that lived only for a day. (He also vindicated the authors of those ephemerae, although or because they did not aim at immortality. Their writings were not to be admired, exactly, 'since nothing can be admired when it ceases to exist,' but they had uses 'more adequate to the purposes of common life than more pompous and durable volumes.')[26] Johnson's essay builds on earlier eighteenth-century uses of 'grub' to describe hack writers, the pens for hire who were said to have clustered in the environs of Grub Street near Moorsfields in London and who seemed to represent the most humble, mindless, and larva-like form of literary life.[27] The essay builds on these associations, however, so as to register an emerging insistence on organizing and categorizing

25 Maude 1824, 49, 50–51. I owe knowledge of this poem to Krüger 2019.
26 Johnson, *Yale Edition*, vol. 3, ed. Bate, 1969, 11.
27 McDowell 2012, 54.

print production by distinguishing books from non-books: it evokes 'an idea of knowledge as a complex eco-system with its own evanescent life forms, part of an overarching, hierarchical order of nature.'[28]

Other writers took up Johnson's influential analogy. In the 1785 poem *The News-paper*, for example, in which George Crabbe complains of the triflers who publish at present in Gazettes, and Ledgers, and Chronicles, and Posts, he mentions 'base Ephemeras, so born / To die before the next revolving morn.'[29] In a chapter in his 1819 *Biographia Literaria* on the conduct of periodical publications, the critic and poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge makes sardonic reference to the humming and buzzing of 'Gnats, beetles, wasps, butterflies, and the whole tribe of ephemerals and insignificants.'[30] The insects conjured up by Coleridge's metaphor *swarm*. They represent an infestation. The point made by those who wield such entomological figures is that thanks to its duplicative powers print sometimes preserves *too much*.

In an earlier essay, written in 1743 to introduce the immense collection of pamphlets the publisher Thomas Osborne had purchased from the Earl of Oxford, Robert Harley, Johnson had mentioned how 'in the Neighbouring Nation, the common appellation' for writings published as pamphlets or as single sheets derived from their propensity to evade the archivist's grasp by getting lost or being destroyed: these pieces of print circulating promiscuously beyond the protection of the bound book were generally identified, Johnson said, as *fugitive pieces* or *flying sheets* (*pièces fugitives* or *feuilles volantes*) because 'after having amused Mankind for a while, [they were subject] to take their Flight and disappear for ever.'[31] Johnson spotlights how in France criminological and arboreal analogies were being used to categorize and order print. In fact, an entomological analogy parallel to the one that he would later help to launch in his *Rambler* essay would come into independent existence in the French language in the late nineteenth century. In French *papillon* remains both the word for a butterfly and a designation for particular transient products of job printing—the leaflets and fliers manufactured for advertising purposes, the parking tickets left on automobile windscreens.

This division, hardening as the eighteenth century turned into the nineteenth century, between the temporality of the printed book and the temporality of ephemeral or ephemeralised, fugitive forms of print had as a counterpart

28 Russell 2018, 179; see also McDowell 2012.
29 Crabbe 1785, 5.
30 Coleridge, *Major Works*, ed. Jackson, 2008, 381.
31 Quoted in McDowell 2012, 63.

a corresponding division between the printed book and the manuscript book. That division too could be anchored by entomological references. Coleridge, for example, referenced flying, fleeting insects when he titled one of the notebooks that he maintained in the 1820s *Fly-Catcher/ a day-book for impounding stray thoughts*. He also turned to the ornithological, titling another notebook from this decade *Volatilia or Day-Book for bird-liming stray small Thoughts impounding stray thoughts and holding for Trial Doubtful thoughts*.[32]

Participants in album culture were quite self-conscious about the challenge their handiwork posed to the opposition, then hardening and becoming ever more forceful a factor in people's experience of print, between books and ephemera. The keeping of an album could often entail deploying the durability and the powers of perpetuation associated with the codex form to keep trifling, fleeting, inconsequential, stuff. Albums archive poems, images, advertisements, or anecdotes clipped from newspapers (Johnson's 'papers of the day'), or puzzle games that presumably can be played out and deciphered only once (see Fig. 1)—materials that ordinarily might have only the most abridged sort of lease on life. In the album one encounters that paradoxical category explicated by the media theorist Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, 'the enduring ephemeral': or, as the literary scholar and ephemerologist Gillian Russell has put it in her gloss on Chun, the category of 'what endures in perverse persistence even when it was supposed to be thrown away or disappear.'[33] Albums amalgamate and thereby queer the temporalities of the notebook, the newspaper, and the printed book.

In this context it makes sense that winged insects, epitomes of what is volatile and scanty and light and slight, should be the beneficiaries of the manuscript album's curious porousness. Winged insects are frequently selected as subjects of album poetry and art for many reasons, as we have seen, but also because that choice registers the album's status as a structure enabling the accrual of minor, fleeting things and enabling their dispersal as well. Albums are loosely bound as codicological units, even when, in a literal sense, as material books, they are tightly bound. The contents they contain are there on a provisional basis, their collections contingent and prone to disassembly. As I have observed elsewhere, albums are books that come together only as other books come apart. To fill up one book's pages many other books are likely be excerpted and clipped (sometimes literally): they will be mined for choice stanzas by someone on the hunt for poetic content, their frontispieces or engravings will be scissored out.[34] And

32 On Coleridge's notebooks, see Hess 2012; Brooker 2020.
33 Russell 2020, 20; Chun 2008.
34 Lynch 2018, 89.

materials that were relocated and deposited within the album were subject to being removed from it once again: everyone who has examined albums from the nineteenth century has had occasion to ponder the signs that at some point in the past some pages were excised from the volume, perhaps because a friendship was being consigned to oblivion, perhaps because somebody messed up the artistic project they had planned as their contribution.

When they imagined scenarios in which by happenstance a creature came to fly onto or creep between the pages, the makers of albums were acknowledging the other side of this porousness. I referred earlier to the trompe-l'oeil effects that can make it appear as though a beetle has crawled into a book, volunteering itself as a living ornament. James Montgomery's poem 'Epitaph on a Gnat, found crushed on the Leaf of a Lady's Album' (which calls on the reader to halt at this page as though at a gravestone and recall that 'This speck had life, and suffered death!') was a favourite candidate for transcription into other people's albums in the decade that followed its publication in 1829.[35]

The tensions I have been tracing between the Romantic album-makers' commitment to book-keeping—to the perpetuating powers of the bound codex—and their fascination with fugitivity are writ large in another insect-centred page in an album, this one a volume assembled between 1816 and 1849, and now held at the Houghton Library at Harvard University (Fig. 6). At the top of page is an image of a moth or perhaps a mayfly, painted at life size: the frame in which it is encased focuses our gaze, bestowing importance on this memorial of a short-lived insect by declaring it art. Below this image is a poem written out by hand that begins 'Poor insect! What a little day of sunny bliss is thine!' It then goes on, stressing the insect's vulnerability to mischance, to moralize in a conventional strain about the transience of human life. The lines on either side of the framed picture at the top of the page are in a different idiom as well as a different hand, and in tandem with the imaged insect they change the topic. In their engagement with quotidian, tiny, transient matters, these lines seem, in conjunction with that fly-portrait, to deliver a metacommentary on how albums get filled up and how and what these books keep. On the left-hand side of the page, one reads:

> Being in Cottingham in 1809 J.M. [?] was shown some Vermin in a Crumb of Bread and was asked if it was not wonderful ! to think to write upon a subject so trifling. JM, in answer, said, What in Nature is there that one cannot write upon. Immediately his friend show'd JM a scarcely perceptible speck on a pane of Glass, and said there's a Subject for you. JM instantly took his pen and wrote the lines on the opposite side of this drawing.

35 Montgomery 1828, 67.

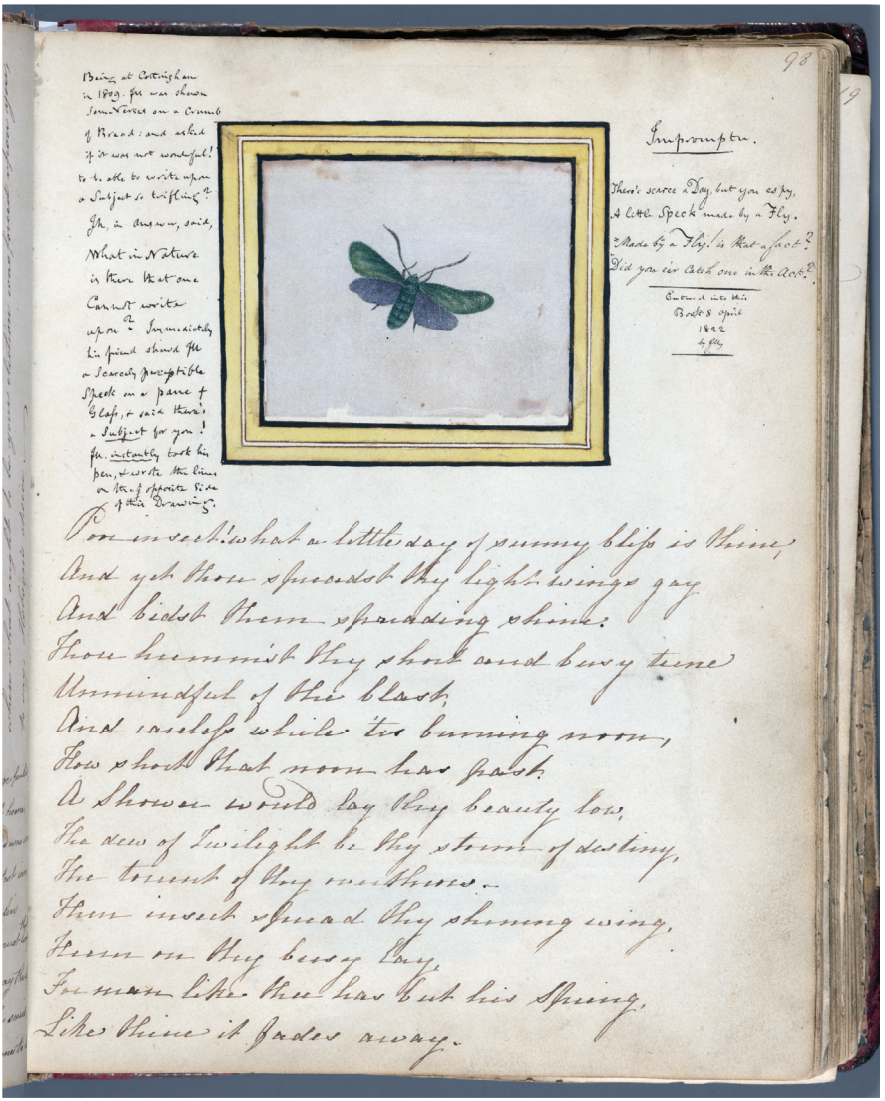

Fig. 6: Page from an anonymous commonplace book, 1822. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Libraries, Houghton Library, Ms Eng 1882.

The follow-up is in verse, found on the right-hand side of the page:

Impromptu
There's scarce a Day, but you espy
A little speck made by a Fly
'Made by a Fly?' Is that a fact?
Did you e'er catch one in the act?

Entered in this
Book 8 April
1822
by JM

J. M., whose identity is now lost to history, here works out an analogy between the scarcely perceptible trace that an insect leaves of its existence (the eye might be deceived in thinking there is anything to see on the window-pane at all) and the autobiographical record that he has entrusted to this book, a record of a moment of impromptu conversing and scribbling with a friend that took place thirteen years before. Manuscript albums during the Romantic era were deeply embedded in the transient occurrences and transactions of everyday life. In being open to writing that was dedicated to nothing, or next to it (a speck that may or may not be there), they were also dedicated to giving those fleeting social exchanges of passing interest a discursive afterlife. They served as 'shelters of inconsequence' (Simon Reader's term for Victorian notebooks fits manuscript albums as well).[36] As this essay has suggested, by following the trail of the bugs in these books we will better remember that service.

36 Reader 2021, 4.

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