

Marketing Thornton Burgess

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Abstract

The author Thornton W. Burgess mediated the natural world for several generations of Americans during the 20th century. Although there have been efforts (e.g., Brooks, 1980; Lowrance, 2013) to assert his centrality in the history of American environmental communication, he is rarely mentioned in such accounts. This paper explores one possible explanation for his omission from the history: the commercial motives underpinning Burgess's environmental work. Despite being cited as a significant influence by environmental activists (Brower, 1990) and wildlife scientists (Pettingill, 1992), the (perceived) divide between environmental motives and commercial motives has left Burgess vulnerable to the kinds of criticisms that have been made against a figure who was very much his successor, Walt Disney (Whitley, 2008).

This paper is based on an exhaustive bibliographic and textual review of nearly 50 years worth of Burgess stories, magazine columns and radio program transcripts (Oehlkers, 2013). It maintains a critical textual and political economic perspective throughout, but is not solely critical. Rather it seeks to understand the mutual interdependencies of and friction between media economics and environmental communication during the first half of the 20th century. It focuses on three of Burgess's most important environmental communication enterprises: his daily newspaper story featuring animal characters (1912-1960), his magazine-sponsored bird sanctuary campaign (1917-1924), and his pioneering radio program, The Radio Nature League (1925-1930; 1933-1936).

Drawing on Philippon's (2004) dramatistic analysis of American nature writers, this paper focuses on the key metaphor of "community" at the heart of Burgess's work. It is the use of such communities for the sale of commodities that presents the problem this paper explores.

Introduction.

Thornton W. Burgess is a central but often overlooked figure in the history of the early 20th century North American conservation whose profound legacy is beginning to be recognized (Lowrance, 2013). Burgess is perhaps unique in having developed professional media skills before his career as environmental communicator; his work as an advertising copywriter and magazine editor allowed him to see the value of new communication technologies, build communities, motivate audiences, as well as move product. A look at his career displays some of the complexities, even contradictions, of the relationship between the organization of his audiences for environmental action and the commodities driving the communication channels he employed.

This paper examines three moments in Thornton Burgess's career that display this relationship between communities and commodities: his (best-known) work as a writer of animal stories for young readers (1912-1960); his bird sanctuary campaign associated with the monthly magazine, *People's Home Journal* (1917-1924); and his pioneering radio program, the Radio Nature League (1925-1930; 1933-1936). To prepare for this paper, the author undertook an exhaustive review of Burgess's work, including 15,000 daily newspaper stories, all issues of the *People's Home Journal* from the period in question, and all available radio scripts from the comprehensive Thornton W. Burgess archive at Boston University (Oehlkers, 2013).

Burgess's early career in mass communication.

Before his career as a full-time nature writer, Thornton W. Burgess worked for Phelps Publishing in Springfield, MA in a variety of capacities: as writer of articles, stories, and verse; as a news photographer; and as the editor of children's and "home" pages. His work for Phelps began with the agricultural periodical, the *New England Homestead* and the urban weekly, the *Springfield Homestead* (two papers that shared their "home" page content); eventually he became a managing editor at *Good Housekeeping*. Before (and after) his work at Phelps, Burgess earned money writing advertising copy. While he worked at Phelps he frequently freelanced for other publications, most notably *Country Life in America*, under the pen name, W. B. Thornton.

Burgess, like many Americans during this time, was an avid nature lover (and hunter). When possible, his contributions focused on natural themes, including articles about the dangers of feral cats, photographs of moose, and poetry about chickadees. His 1902 work at *Country Life* compiling monthly nature calendars put him in contact with two figures central to the Nature Study movement, Liberty Hyde Bailey and Frank Chapman (Armitage, 2011). Nevertheless, his writing overall for Phelps publications was much more general, ranging from articles promoting the home use of cameras to poetry memorializing the death of William McKinley.

During his sixteen years at Phelps (1895-1911), Burgess was involved in a number of projects that demonstrate his exposure to the power of print media as a creator of communities and a mobilizer of publics; one can also see a growing shrewdness in employing storytelling for strictly commercial purposes (he was in charge of developing puzzles and stories to get readers to examine advertising). As "Young Folk's Editor" in 1904, he instituted an "Outdoors Club" and established a correspondence feature, "Friends of our Native Birds." Children were asked to write in with lists of birds they had observed. They were also asked to write about what they had done for birds, such as putting out food or building houses (or removing house sparrow nests). (Oehlkers, 2010 July 9). Here's an example

urging readers to send in membership applications for the bird club that shows how he used hard-sell advertising language in service of the cause:

WHO WILL BE FIRST from his or her county to be enrolled? Think of the suffering you can relieve at no trouble to yourself. ...DON'T DELAY. Think of the vivacious beauty of the plainest of our songsters and then picture to yourself that happy little sprite perishing miserably of starvation and exposure. Don't delay, girls and boys! Did you ever have the cold nip your fingers and toes until you cried? Then think of the little birds who cannot help themselves. If they have enough to eat they will keep warm. Won't you help in this great work? GET OTHERS TO HELP. Don't stop with your own efforts. Get all of your friends to do likewise. When they are also feeding the birds, send in their names to be added to the roll. Let us see what town will lead in this good work. Begin now. Don't postpone. (*New England Homestead*, 1904 December 24)

It is important to note that Burgess was not a pioneer in the use of these tools. Correspondence clubs, even bird protection clubs, can be seen in the pages of children-oriented publications such as *St. Nicholas Magazine*, some 20 to 30 years earlier (Doughty, 1975). Burgess was simply deploying tools already at his disposal. From a publisher's point of view, it should be noted, that in addition to "doing good" these features also engaged young readers and encouraged continued subscriptions.

The Bedtime Story Community.

I have, or at least I hope I have, very many stories of Peter Rabbit and his friends. To kill any of them would be to end my career as an author of this kind of type of story, and I fear that I, in my turn, would be forced to say, "When do I eat?" --Thornton W. Burgess in a 1922 letter to *Outlook* in response to an editorial critical of the lack of predation in animal stories titled, "When do we eat?" (Oehlkers, 2010, March 9)

Thornton Burgess's animal character books are probably his most enduring legacy. Beginning in 1913 and continuing into the 1920s, Little, Brown & Co. published four or more books a year. Many are still in print and have a renewed life as public domain documents easily repackaged for new readers. These books are sometimes cited as central inspirations for individuals in various environmental roles (Lowrance, 2013). David Brower (1990), for example, modeled himself after Burgess's central human character, "Farmer Brown's Boy" after reading *The Adventures of Bobby Coon*; Owen Pettingill (1991), the influential ornithologist, reports being initially inspired by *The Burgess Bird Book for Children*. These books also made Burgess a fortune and he worked tirelessly to promote them, making extensive bookstore appearances throughout North America and giving speeches about book marketing at book seller's conventions.

Less well remembered is the fact that these series books were compiled from individual newspaper stories, Burgess's daily bedtime/nature story feature, syndicated in newspapers across the United States and Canada from 1912 to 1960. Burgess had researched the syndicated newspaper story market (this is before the rise of the daily comics page) and reports in his memoir (1960) that he developed his stories as high quality, factually accurate, and morally instructive alternatives to what was available (Howard Garis's "Uncle Wiggily," for example). There was also a built-in market for nature stories. By the time Burgess began publishing his newspaper bedtime stories in 1912, interest in nature among the public of the United States and Canada was widespread, fueled by the Nature Study Movement (Armitage, 2011) as well as Theodore Roosevelt and other public figures. Ralph Lutts (2001) argues, that in fact, this era was unique in its receptivity to wild animal stories. "Little Stories for Bedtime" was a title given to him by Associated Newspapers (his syndicate), not one he

preferred. When he moved to the *New York Tribune's* syndicate in 1920, the feature was renamed "Burgess Bedtime Stories, making specific reference to his "brand" but maintaining the idea that these were stories for young children. By the 1930s, Burgess's favored title would be "Nature Stories" but very few newspapers complied.

Burgess's stories were ultimately stories not of individual animals but of an animal community (with episodic focus on individuals), particularly the animals commonly discovered in natural settings in the Northeast of the United States. In fact, Burgess's community encompassed not only the birds and mammals that were the main characters in his stories, but also flowers, trees, mollusks, insects, and even atmospheric phenomena ("Mother West Wind" and the "Merry Little Breezes.") The character of "Farmer Brown's Boy" was the chief human participant in this community. Through his stories, Burgess enabled empathetic entry into the non-human community. For example, a child might play-act the role of "Jimmy Skunk" on the playground (Oehlkers, 2012, August 29). "Jimmy Skunk" also became an actual being one could encounter in one's natural environment with warm feelings and sympathy rather than the fear and disgust that is a more common reaction to skunks.

In 1914, with the Burgess story quickly becoming one of its most popular features, *The Kansas City Star* began promoting a "Bedtime Story Club." Anyone who would agree to the terms of the club ("be kind to the birds and animals and protect them from their enemies") could write to the paper, have their name published, and receive a button and a certificate of membership. Burgess wrote letters addressed to readers for the *Star* supporting the club, even suggesting that wild animals would become friendly to button-wearers. Tens of thousands of readers joined. Other papers in the Associated Newspapers group adopted the model and by 1916 *The New York Globe* would run a daily Bedtime Story Club page. In addition to Burgess's story, there were other animal-related columns and activities, as well as ads for Burgess-related shows, sheet music, books, records, and toys. Burgess stories had become big business.

Indeed, the Burgess feature had long been viewed by its syndicate from a marketing perspective. The publisher of the *New York Globe* described its value as follows:

These little stories are without question the best thing of the kind produced, and are one of the very best newspaper features. Following the lead of *The Kansas City Star*...we stuck to the job until we had 198,000 children enrolled as members of *The Globe's* Bed Time Story Club. This meant that a large part of these 198,000 children "cried for *The Globe*" every night.... This huge children's organization, the largest of its kind in any city in the country, is a deep-rooted, far-reaching affair. It works its way into all sorts and conditions of households. Children of the richest and most exclusive families in New York and vicinity are just as much interested as others...In my meetings with prominent business men it is not unusual for me to hear the remark: "My grandson is a great admirer of your newspaper. He started us taking *The Globe* for that Bed Time Story, and now we all like it." (Roberts, 1918)

Like daily comics later, the feature was used to attract children and create household demand. The stories were serialized (Burgess previewed the next day's story) creating desire for daily reading. The club increased demand via premiums and bringing children together in a community--a community that could be mobilized. One such mobilization happened in October 1915 in the Bronx Botanical Gardens, reportedly attracting over 9,000 children. (As is true today, this mass meeting was also a sampling opportunity—representatives from ice cream, milk, chocolate, and cocoa sellers also attended). (Oehlkers, 2010, March 3)

In fact, by 1915 Burgess had already leveraged his stories for an enterprise of his own. The 1000th Burgess bedtime story, titled “Johnny and Polly Chuck join the Quaddies,” told of Peter Rabbit’s creation of the “Ancient and Supreme Order of the Quaddies.” The society, comprising quadrupeds and some honorary birds, was essentially a mutual security pact, based on the real nature fact that animals of different species and orders can recognize and respond to each other’s alarm signals. Quaddy was also a trademarked brand name and Burgess promoted its use in connection with his books and licensed it to toy makers. (Oehlkers, 2010, January 24). Harrison Cady, now Burgess’s regular illustrator, supplied the character designs. Burgess’s Quaddy line was the beneficiary of a character-licensing machine that had developed over the previous twenty years to sell toys based on characters from the comics, starting with Palmer Cox’s brownies, Richard Outcault’s Yellow Kid and Buster Brown, et al. (Cross, 1999).

Unlike an earlier generation of nature writers, Burgess was careful with his nature facts lest he be labeled a “nature faker” (Lutts, 1990), though the first year or two of his tales may be said to be more “boys-in-disguise” than true-to-life nature stories. Nevertheless, there were certain accommodations to perceived commercial realities that would haunt Burgess when he later strived to be taken more seriously. Harrison Cady’s illustrations, for example, generally depicted the animal characters upright, wearing clothes. Peter Rabbit was modeled after a white domestic rabbit, not a cottontail. Indeed, Cady would use the same rabbit design for his thoroughly anthropomorphized long-running Sunday comic strip character, also named Peter Rabbit. During the first two decades of the series, scenes of predation were limited to cater to the emotions of younger readers (this would change dramatically during the 1930s as Burgess sought to attract more adult readers). Finally, Burgess placed the (nonpredator) animals in relatively cordial relations that are more human than not: Peter and “Mrs. Peter” Rabbit’s marriage endured for the length of the series; mating among actual cottontails is purely opportunistic. Burgess, it should be noted, was conscious of these issues and defended the clothing and communication styles on strategic grounds. Children should know that animals have distinct appearances and that they do communicate with each other; furthermore, the anthropomorphism, necessary for readers to form an empathetic relationship with the characters, was relatively mild compared to most commercial animal stories. Johnny Chuck, he pledged, would never be seen driving a car. (Burgess, 1960).

Curiously, Burgess’s stories became less and less commercial and more naturalistic and devoted to conservation issues as the series went on. (To this extent it is regrettable that the first two years of Burgess’s stories are the ones most often reprinted and read by modern audiences). By 1916 Burgess was working with William T. Hornaday to promote reforms in American game hunting regulations (the *Adventures of Poor Mrs. Quack* dates from this period). Hornaday had been impressed by the size of Burgess’s community of readers and particularly the mass mobilization at the Bronx Botanical Gardens in October 1915. This community was ripe to be mobilized for other, environmentally relevant causes.

Green Meadow Club Bird Sanctuary Campaigns (1917-1923).

The impressive thing, to us, is not the acreage but the alacrity of response. Rarely, if ever, has an editorial appeal met with such instant and friendly recognition. Which proves once again that subscribers of *The People’s Home Journal* are unusually responsive to ideas that advance the nation’s welfare. Proves too, that the *Journal* exerts a home influence which is definite, demonstrable, and dependable. (*Printers’ Ink*, 1917, August 9)

Starting in 1913, Burgess contributed a monthly story to *The People's Home Journal*, a farm family-oriented publication with a circulation of 900,000. These stories, which were more fable-like than his newspaper feature, would be collected in his "Mother West Wind" series of books. He also founded the "Green Meadow Club," which asked readers to make the following pledge as a condition of membership:

I promise to learn all I can about the little wild people about me; to try to make them my friends; never to believe ill of them until I am sure of it; never to harm or frighten them needlessly; to do all I can to protect our song and insectivorous birds; to be gentle and merciful to all animals.

Thousands of readers sent in signed pledges and the magazine urged more still. The pitch: to join "what promises to be the greatest organization in the world for the protection of our birds and animals." (Oehlkers, 2010, February 23).

In 1917, under Burgess's direction and with the encouragement of William T. Hornaday, the *Journal* began a seven-year series of bird protection campaigns that targeted private landowners willing to ban hunting on their properties. Readers were employed as agents for the campaign, asked to solicit pledges from their neighbors. The readers with the most acreage pledged would win prizes, including medals from Hornaday's conservation organization. The campaigns would not end, according to the *Journal*, until it met its overall target of 5 million acres (about the size of Massachusetts).

The United States was in the process of joining WWI so there was an additional patriotic appeal on top of the value of protecting American wildlife. Insectivorous and weed seed-eating birds were vital to the food security of the US, thus the initial campaigns also functioned to support the goals of Herbert Hoover's Food Administration. Here is the pledge that landowners were asked to sign:

Knowing the supreme economic importance of bird life to all branches of American agriculture and its intimate relation to human welfare and happiness, and as a patriotic citizen desiring to do my share toward the conservation of bird life, and, so far as possible to promote its increase, I hereby agree that all the land which I own, rent or lease shall be made a Green Meadow Club Bird Sanctuary: that I will neither hunt thereon, except for the extermination of pests; that I will do what I can to protect the birds, both resident and migratory; that I will post in conspicuous places the Sanctuary notices furnished me.

The Migratory Bird Treaty Act had already been signed into law by this date, though it was still being contested on Constitutional grounds, so even though migratory birds were protected in theory, the law's enforcement throughout the US was uncertain. Moreover "resident" birds were not covered in the Act, so their protection was a key goal of the campaign. The decline of the Northern Bobwhite, severe today, was already noticeable at this point and thus that species (a weed seed eater) became a campaign focal point. (Oehlkers, 2010, February 24)

During the months during which the campaign was running, the *Journal* devoted a full page, which might have otherwise been devoted to advertising, to charting the progress of acreage pledged and encouraging readers to solicit more pledges. These pages often included direct messages from Burgess and Hornaday as well as endorsements from prominent government officials.

There was no apparent mechanism for certifying compliance with the pledges so it may very well be that the true aim of the campaign lay elsewhere. The process of persuading landowners would, for

example, force a familiarity with facts about birds and their economic value as controls on insect populations and help to spread this information. It also enabled readers to act on their Green Meadow Club pledges and engaged them as citizen protectors of the environment rather than asking them simply to support larger organizational (Audubon) or government efforts. And the fact of this mobilization was useful for advertisers.

In a series of ads in *Printers' Ink* targeting potential advertisers (and potential government regulators), the *Journal* tracked the progress of the campaign. The May 10, 1917 ad made the initial announcement:

The 25,000 members of The Green Meadow Club, founded by *The People's Home Journal* and conducted through its columns by the eminent naturalist, Thornton W. Burgess, are being urged in the June issue to visit all landholders in their respective vicinities and appeal to them to make every garden, orchard farm and forest a bird sanctuary—a refuge for insectivorous birds. ...We will take pleasure in telling you, in a few months, what the Green Meadow Club has accomplished in this big undertaking...This is another of the movements for the general public inaugurated and fostered by *The People's Home Journal*—a magazine with a mighty influence for good—a publication that accomplishes the things it sets out to do.

To a certain extent the campaign was simply positive public relations for the *Journal*, relating the current campaign to other magazine-driven movements during the Progressive Era, including the Pure Food and Drug cause (in which Burgess had participated as an editor for *Good Housekeeping*). The follow-up ad on July 20, however, suggests an additional value.

The response from *Journal* readers to our Bird Sanctuary appeal was immediate and enthusiastic....Already nearly 12,000 acres have been donated. The *Journal's* aim is 100,000 acres as a first response from its subscribers.

Illustrating the ad was a “Sanctuary Dial,” showing the *Journal's* progress month-by-month towards its goal. By the August 9 issue of *Printer's Ink*, the dial stood at 32,000, with acres reportedly coming in at nearly 3 and a half square miles a day. The ad touted the responsiveness of *Journal* subscribers, not simply to “ideas that advance the nation's welfare,” but implicitly to *Journal* advertisers. It could be trusted to “exert a home influence” and that home influence was what advertisers desired: “definite, demonstrable and dependable.” The mobilization of audiences for pro-environmental causes was parallel to the mobilization of audiences for commercial causes.

Radio Nature League (1925-1930; 1933-36).

[W]e may begin to picture for ourselves what radio will mean in our homes in the years to come. We shall all have receiving sets—there is little doubt of that. We shall come down in the morning to hear the newspaper headlines while we eat...and at six or seven, when the boys and girls have had their supper and are ready for bed, someone like Thornton Burgess may lift the transmitter in his home and broadcast a Bed-Time Story to a million youngsters all over the land. --Bruce Barton, 1922, “This magic thing called radio.” (Oehlkers, 2010, March 23).

Burgess stories were being read on the radio as early as 1922, and although Burgess was not the one reading them he was directly involved in their production. By 1924 he was invited to WBZ studios in Springfield, MA (a short drive from his home) to talk about nature topics. In 1925 he took his club idea to a new medium and founded the “Radio Nature League,” a weekly program about nature topics

supported by correspondence from listeners. In addition to sending in questions, listeners were asked to join the League by sending in postcards (listeners who also pledged to do things such as putting out bird feeders were given “stars” on their cards.) By January 1926, the membership stood at 20,000, coming from across the country (the radio spectrum was not yet overcrowded) and even from England.

The program featured lectures on nature topics from Burgess and guests (including a number of experts associated with the Boston Society of Natural History) as well as a review of correspondence, including answers to listeners’ queries. League members were also mobilized for a variety of causes including citizen science, roadside beautification, and wildlife protection. Ongoing projects included the collection of Ruffed Grouse specimens for an investigation of grouse mortality and the destruction of tent caterpillar nests. Burgess used his forum to complain about the management of White-tailed Deer hunting in Massachusetts (a “slaughter of innocents”) and to dramatize the suffering caused by steel traps.

Throughout the program’s first run Burgess also solicited donations from listeners to support the administrative tasks associated with the program (particularly the high volume of correspondence). He frequently stressed the fact that he was doing the program without compensation. (In fact, Burgess reused portions of his Radio Nature League scripts for a weekly newspaper column distributed across the country so the issue of compensation is actually unclear). In 1930, citing personal financial circumstances (he had been hit hard by the Depression) and increased pressure on his time-slot from sponsored programming, he ceased broadcasting.

When Burgess returned to WBZ in 1933, the “League” concept was de-emphasized and his program was used to promote his bedtime story properties and his other work, particularly his new field guide, *Birds You Should Know*. LaFollette (2008) documents Burgess admitting that the radio talks of this era served to promote “Thornton Burgess.” At the same time, Burgess long harbored greater ambitions for his program, making several unsuccessful pitches to radio networks and searching for a sponsor that could support a regular time slot and fund a higher level of production. In 1935 he found such a sponsor, a pharmaceutical based in Worcester, MA--Brewer & Company. The Radio Nature League would be reborn to promote Brewer’s brand of cod liver oil, “Sun Glow.”

The Brewer-sponsored program still included, as time allowed, League member experiences and questions but focused more on dramatizations, such as Burgess’s experiences on a fishing schooner, and repartee between Burgess and a cast of characters, many of whom embodied ethnic and regional stereotypes. Lectures were spiced up with sound effects and live animal demonstrations were sensationalized. When a guest brought in a rattlesnake, for example, Burgess scripted-in fake lunges. Burgess wasn’t responsible for pitching Sun Glow himself (that task fell to a WBZ announcer) but he did use a new end tagline, “And happiness from health to you all,” which was sometimes explicitly linked to the use of the sponsor’s product. (Oehlkers, 2010, April 22). A monthly newsletter, “Radio Nature League News,” was distributed to druggists; Burgess urged listeners to patronize only druggists that carried it. (Oehlkers, 2010, April 21).

Missing almost entirely from the Brewer-sponsored series were attempts to mobilize audiences in service of environmental causes. Entertainment value, such as a focus on strange-but-true nature facts, was the show’s currency. Burgess later admitted that the show was a failure and resented the intrusion of the sponsor into its production. (LaFollette, 2008). He would return to the airwaves one for one more short-lived program in 1939 sponsored by his local chapter of the ASPCA.

Assessing Burgess's place in the history of environmental communication.

In his 2004 book, *Conserving Words*, Daniel Philippon presents a conceptual framework for understanding five key figures in the history of North American conservation. Philippon uses eight categories to express the dramatic (Burkean) frame associated with each figure.

For example, for Mabel Wright, Thornton W. Burgess's contemporary, Philippon lists the following

- Historical Context: early eastern suburbs
- Discursive Frame: "nature" as garden
- Narrative Enabled: cultivating the garden
- Values Conveyed: aesthetic/cultural
- Objects of Injustice/neglect: birds/suburbs
- Organization Founded: Audubon Society
- Organization Type: national and local
- Landscape protected: Birdcraft Sanctuary

We might tentatively assign the following to Thornton W. Burgess

- Historical Context: growth of mass media/hunting reform
- Discursive Frame: "nature" as community
- Narrative Enabled: care for wildlife
- Values Conveyed: conventional morality/economic
- Objects of Injustice/neglect: local wildlife
- Organization Founded: Green Meadow Club/Radio Nature League (neither has endured)
- Organization Type: national, international
- Landscape protected: local environments/bird sanctuaries on private land

Unlike the nature writers that Philippon investigates, Burgess was primarily a figure of the mass media. Indeed, he carefully cultivated and promoted his media persona in order to mobilize his communities to the causes he endorsed. While Burgess worked behind the scenes as an officer at the Massachusetts Audubon Society and his local chapter of the ASPCA, he can't be said to have left behind any enduring organization. Each of his groups disbanded when Burgess ceased being involved. This makes sense given that Burgess himself was the chief node through which his communities connected.

Nevertheless, given his role mediating nature to generations of Americans, some (Brooks, 1980; Lowrance, 2013) have seen fit to place him within the pantheon of important twentieth century American environmental communicators. There is no consensus about this, however, and Lowrance in particular sees her role as one of bringing Burgess and his work back into the spotlight. In the 1970s there was a backlash against Burgess books. Not only were they "series" books (disfavored by many librarians at the time) they were perceived as featuring overly anthropomorphized animals, as well as being written in an archaic moralizing style. (Meanwhile in Japan the popularity of a series of Burgess book translations inspired a single season animated series, distributed around the world as "Fables of the Green Forest"). Burgess books now seem most popular among the home-schooled and audiences seeking books with explicit moral instruction (the *National Review*, for example, has republished Burgess books in a hardcover edition). (Oehlkers, 2010, March 10).

Nature to Burgess was a community, composed of individual beings deserving compassion and care. While he had an implicit ecological sensibility, organizing his stories around particular habitats, for example, as he grew older he gravitated more to animal welfare issues than large-scale conservation efforts. Indeed, for residents of Springfield and later Hampden, MA, he became a one-man animal rescue service and was a significant booster of the local bird hospital. (O’Neil, 1960, November 14). The communities of humans and non-humans could productively converge, but only if there was sufficient good will and knowledge on the human side. When it came to the unrestrained and often cruel hunting practices of his time, he responded by dramatizing sympathetically the plight of the hunted and sought to create sanctuaries where animals could be safe from human predation.

At the same time, his work is impossible to entangle from the media that hosted and boosted his persona and the economic imperatives underpinning that media. To use modern language, he and/or his media were able to “monetize” the communities he brought together and narrated. The Green Meadow Bird Sanctuary Campaign is a particularly interesting case in point. The mobilization of audiences for social good and the mobilization of audiences for commerce were two sides of the same coin. Indeed it was during this era that some historians (Ewen, 2001) place fundamental changes in the nature of mass advertising. The successes of WWI propaganda (in which Burgess, as a member of the “Vigilantes” was deeply involved) supported techniques for the promotion of mass consumption. As Burgess learned to his regret, with the commercialization of radio broadcasting came pressures to entertain—his Radio Nature League community became an audience urged to consume.

It is worth comparing Thornton Burgess to Walt Disney, a figure that was in many specific ways his successor. Disney was a newsboy in Kansas City at the height of the *Kansas City Star’s* Bedtime Story Club furor. He was a noted fan of Burgess’s illustrator, Harrison Cady. And he professed an abiding love for nature that was reflected in film, television programs, and the comics page (media Burgess tried but was unable to break into), even as he licensed and merchandised his properties relentlessly. The values of entertainment--nature at its most dramatic and strangest (sometimes faked) that fueled and frustrated Burgess on the Brewer-sponsored Radio Nature League--became Disney hallmarks. It is worth looking at *Bambi* (1941) in particular, as it shares the eastern woodland community with many of Burgess’s stories and is based around a narrative of human predation. (*Bambi* is very similar to Burgess’s character, Lightfoot the Deer.) While predation was subdued in Burgess stories (at least during the series’ earliest years) *Bambi* erases predation among nonhumans altogether (Lutts, 1992). Humans become the sole locus of fear. Nevertheless, like Burgess, *Bambi* uses the strategy of sympathetically dramatizing the plight of the hunted.

In a letter to Harrison Cady near the end of his life (“An Old Man’s Dream”) Burgess expressed his desire that his home and property be converted into a sanctuary; this became MassAudubon’s “Laughing Brook” property. (Lowrance, 2013). In this dream he described a shop where children could buy penny candy and cookies shaped like characters from his stories. The connection between the protection of wildlife and commerce continued in his thinking until the end. While Burgess could be quite critical of certain commercially-driven social changes—he resented the way the automobile, for example, disrupted natural settings—he was silent about, and may not have even recognized, that commerce and environmental protection could stand in contradiction to each other. The revolution in environmental thinking stimulated by the writings of Rachel Carson corresponds with the end of Burgess’s influence on the American public. (Whether Carson was a Burgess fan I’ve never been able to determine).

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