Tarzan of the Apes Short Guide

Tarzan of the Apes by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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Overview

One of Burroughs's chief strengths is his ability to create fictional worlds vastly different from, but parallel to, the real world. The contrast between the "civilized" world of human s and the "uncivilized" world of the jungle runs throughout the Tarzan series. Burroughs's detailed descriptions of language, social behavior, and cultural traditions make his fictional society believable. Throughout Tarzan of the Apes, Burroughs juxtaposes images of the two worlds, as when Tarzan, rightful heir to the Greystoke title, "wiped his greasy fingers upon his naked thighs and took up the trail of Kulonga . . . ; while in far-off London another Lord Greystoke . . . sent back his chops to the club's chef because they were underdone."

An extended fable of evolution, Tarzan of the Apes chronicles its protagonist's rise to prominence in ape society as a result of his superior speed and reasoning power. Tarzan gains further advantage when he discovers weapons—ropes, his father's knife, and, finally, spears, bows, and arrows taken from a native village. He teaches himself to read and write from books found in his father's cabin, and begins to yearn for the life of humans, not apes. When the beautiful young Jane Porter is abandoned in the jungle, the ape-man at last sees his own race.

Later, Tarzan learns the ways of the world from a Frenchman, d'Arnot, whom he has saved. D'Arnot subsequently proves Tarzan's noble ancestry, but Tarzan refuses to press his claim to the Greystoke title, and reaffirms his jungle birth in a remarkable renunciation of Victorian society.

About the Author

One of the most widely read authors of the twentieth century, Edgar Rice Burroughs did not begin writing until age thirty-five. He was born in Chicago on September 1, 1875, and his formal education ended with graduation from the Michigan Military Academy in 1895, after which he enlisted in the U.S. Cavalry in Arizona. He subsequently worked as a gold miner and shopkeeper in Idaho, a factory worker in Chicago, a railroad policeman in Salt Lake City, a mail order manager for Sears, Roebuck, and a door-to-door salesman and speculator.

In 1911, while waiting for his pencil-sharpener salesmen to report in, Burroughs began drafting an adventure story on scraps of paper. The result, "Under the Moons of Mars," sold for four hundred dollars and launched Burroughs on his professional writing career.

Writing with audacity, imagination, and lightning speed, Burroughs soon produced a historical novel about the thirteenth century, a story set inside a hollow earth, two adventure tales, and an amazing account of an English lord nursed and raised by a she-ape on the coast of West Africa. 'Tarzan of the Apes" appeared in the October 1912 issue of All-Story to considerable acclaim. However, several publishers rejected the novel, and the tale did not appear in hardcover until 1914.

In 1923 Burroughs became one of the first authors to incorporate himself, and from this point on Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., marketed and controlled all Burroughs titles and royalties. After 1931 the company took over hardcover publication as well. At the height of the Depression, Burroughs achieved his greatest financial success when the prestigious Liberty magazine paid $10,000 to serialize Tarzan and the Lion Man. He wrote steadily into the early 1940s, when he became the nation's oldest accredited war correspondent, working in the Pacific theater. He died March 19, 1950, in Encino, California.

After his death and the decline of pulp magazines, Burroughs's works suffered their only decline in popularity. But the paperback boom of the 1950s and 1960s and the expiration of copyrights on his early books occasioned a lively publishing war, resulting in the reissuing of almost all his works for a new generation of readers.

Little scholarly attention has been paid to Burroughs's writings. His talent lay in his imaginative creation of other worlds, and his characters and plots seldom broke away from established melodramatic formulas. Yet the Tarzan books have served as staple reading for young adults worldwide for the past 75 years. The subject of a popular television series, numerous comic books and strips, and more than fifty films, the ape-man has become one of the bestknown fictional creations in the world.

Characters

Nearly all of Burroughs's characters are recognizable stereotypes, from the unfortunately comic Negro servants and brutal villains to the supremely beautiful women, good-hearted but weak-willed men, and noble heroes, natives, and even beasts. Tarzan, though, goes beyond stereotype to archetype of the heroic masculine figure. Jane Porter sees a face of "extraordinary beauty, . . . a perfect type of the strongly masculine, unmarred by dissipation, or brutal or degrading passions." The entire Chapter 20, titled "Heredity," stresses Tarzan's perfection. He kisses the locket where her hand had rested in "a stately and gallant little compliment performed with the grace and dignity of utter unconsciousness of self. It was the hallmark of his aristocratic birth, the natural outcropping of many generations of fine breeding, an hereditary instinct of graciousness which a lifetime of uncouth and savage training and environment could not eradicate." Throughout the book and the series, descriptions stress Tarzan's godlike qualities and character, and his actions — primarily of rescue and protection — reinforce the divine nature of his being. Burroughs normally tends to ignore psychological possibilities, but Tarzan does occasionally reflect on his situation as a man of two worlds, not completely at home in either. He rarely laughs, choosing to smile instead, and his perverse practical jokes as an apeman gradually give way to a grim humor about the "civilized" world.

While given to occasional fits of rage, when his world and family are threatened, or subject to plot-necessitated bouts of accidental amnesia, Tarzan nevertheless rarely descends to the merely human.

Jane Porter, too, typifies the Burroughs heroine with her extraordinary beauty described in the vague, sentimental, and suggestive vocabulary of the pulp magazine: age 19, with waistlength blonde hair and a "lithe, young form," her hands often press "tight against her rising and falling bosom."

Yet as fit mate for the jungle god she loves, Jane has enough strength and composure to endure the abductions, near-deaths, and "fate[s] a thousand times worse than death" which she faces throughout the series. In the first novel she shoots a lioness, remains conscious when carried off by a great ape, and retains her wits alone in the jungle at the mercy of a wild white man. She rarely faints or shows the weakness of the typical persecuted heroine, remaining instead clear-headed and committed to the same practice exhibited by the heroes: action rather than passivity. Other characters follow the stereotypical patterns of evil villains, noble friends, weak good men, wise (or absent-minded) elders, broadly comic or satirical portraits of servants, businessmen, natives, royalty, and whatever else the plot may require. Many minor characters literally recur in various novels, but they seem nearly interchangeable anyway.

Setting

At the start of Tarzan of the Apes, mutineers maroon the young Lord and Lady Greystoke on the coast of West Africa. They survive only eighteen months, after which point the she-ape Kala takes their year-old son to replace her own dead baby. The boy grows up among apes, learning from them a rudimentary language (the name 'Tarzan" actually means "white skin"), a strong sense of family, and a system of political hierarchy based on kingship of the strongest. Most of the book takes place in the African jungle, although Burroughs makes frequent implicit comparisons between the two worlds that lay claim to the ape-man. In the jungle, Tarzan depends solely upon his own physical and mental powers; when he ventures into civilization, he feels a prisoner.

Social Concerns

Society and societies lie at the heart of almost all Burroughs's books; indeed, one of his chief strengths derives from his ability to imagine in considerable detail social worlds removed from but parallel to the real world. Whether these societies derive from history, as in the African lost cities founded by ancient Romans or by stranded medieval Crusaders, or from his fertile imagination, as in the wild cities and creatures of Barsoom (Mars), they become convincing through enormous detail of language, social behavior, and tradition. Throughout the Tarzan series, and probably one of the bases of its appeal, runs the constant contrast between the "civilized" world of men and the "uncivilized" world of the jungle. Tarzan of the Apes begins with the worst of society: victims of violent mutineers provoked by a brutal ship's captain, the young Lord and Lady Greystoke become marooned on the coast of West Africa where they survive for eighteen months, after which the she-ape Kala takes their year-old son to replace her own dead baby. So the boy grows up in the society of apes, with its rudimentary language (including names for animals and people — "Tar-zan" means "white skin"), strong sense of family, and clear political structure based on the kingship of the strongest member.

In an extended fable of evolution, Tarzan learns to overcome the physical strength of the apes through, first, his superior speed and reasoning power, then through his discovery of weapons — ropes, his father's knife, and, finally, spears, bows, and arrows taken from a native village. Teaching himself to read and write from books found in his father's cabin, Tarzan yearns for the life of man, not apes. When the beautiful, young Jane Porter, her absentminded father, and William Clayton, Tarzan's cousin and the Greystoke heir, become similarly abandoned by mutineers at the site of the cabin, the apeman sees his own kind, again introduced by brutality and murder, and falls in love. Rescuing Jane from Terkoz, his foster father, Tarzan carries her into the jungle, but reveals his innate human breeding in comparing his intentions with those of Terkoz: "[It] was the order of the jungle for the male to take his mate by force; but could Tarzan be guided by the laws of the beasts? Was not Tarzan a Man? But how did men do? He was puzzled; for he did not know." Chivalry is an ideal human characteristic, presumably bred into the best of the species. Later, Tarzan learns the ways of the world from a Frenchman, d'Arnot, whom he has saved; d'Arnot takes Tarzan to civilization and, through fingerprints, proves Tarzan's ancestry. At the novel's end, however, having rescued Jane from a forest fire in Wisconsin, Tarzan refuses to press his claim to the title, since she had become engaged to Clayton, and reaffirms his jungle birth in a remarkable Victorian renunciation; remarkable, indeed, in a man only three months out of the jungle. Throughout the novel, Burroughs stresses the contrast of the worlds, as when Tarzan "wiped his greasy fingers upon his naked thighs and took up the trail of Kulonga . . . ; while in far-off London another Lord Greystoke . . . sent back his chops to the club's chef because they were underdone."

Despite Tarzan's evolutionary progress, however, the jungle generally contrasts favorably with the more effete and far more ruthless, greedy, and corrupt modern civilization. Tarzan's reflection on the murderous mutineers burying a treasure chest — "Men were indeed more foolish and more cruel than the beasts of the jungle! How

fortunate was he who lived in the peace and security of the great forest!" — remains a fairly consistent ideal throughout the entire series. In The Return of Tarzan (1915), d'Arnot introduces "Monsieur Jean C. Tarzan" to Paris society where the ape-man "smoked too many cigarettes and drank too much absinth . . . because he took civilization as he found it, and did the things that he found his civilized brothers doing." After escaping assassination and fighting a duel — "Your Paris is more dangerous than my savage jungles," he tells d'Arnot — Tarzan returns to the jungle, saves Jane, again shipwrecked near the old cabin, and eventually marries her, settling on a Kenyan estate. The jungle world is far safer, for both Tarzan and Burroughs, who had difficulty depicting the real world.

In addition to suggesting the general superiority of the jungle world, Burroughs also deals with religious and political issues. He wrote his son, "I am a very religious man, but I do not subscribe to any of the narrow, childish superstitions of any creed." Tarzan, like his author, conceives of God as Creator and force of Nature, and in many books he, like John Carter on Barsoom, exposes and destroys the hypocritical and self-serving religions which control their followers by superstition. In the initial book, when Tarzan actually eats offerings set out to appease a jungle god, "the awe-struck savages . . . were filled with consternation and awe, for it was one thing to put food out to propitiate a god or a devil, but quite another thing to have the spirit really come into the village and eat it." In the delightful series of stories dealing with Tarzan's youth, The Jungle Tales of Tarzan (1919) the ape-boy learns of religion among other things, reasoning that "the flowers and trees were good and beautiful. God had made them. He made the other creatures, too, that each might have food upon which to live"; but even the untutored savage discovers the essential religious question when he asks, "Who made Histah the snake?"

Politically, Burroughs's views reflected the conservative ideas of his time. He distrusted communism, and his early villains were often Russians, even though his books later became extremely popular in the Soviet Union.

His attitude appeared most dearly in an unsuccessful story, "Under the Red Flag," which depicted America under a Communist government; believing that the publishers were afraid to print the story, Burroughs reworked the tale into a futuristic novel, The Moon Maid (1926), one of his most interesting nonseries books. The two world wars during which he wrote also brought out jingoistic ideas in which German soldiers become disgustingly sadistic and inhuman beasts (Tarzan the Untamed, 1920), horribly and mercilessly destroyed by Tarzan who believes they have killed Jane; in Tarzan and The Foreign Legion (1947), the World War II Japanese soldiers also reflect the propagandistic views of wartime America.

In the 1930s, his controversial anti-German sentiments hurt his foreign sales, and Burroughs attempted to tone down his consistent use of foreign villains.

As he grew older, too, Burroughs came to emphasize the brutality and waste of war for war's sake, deploring this instance of "civilized" man's inhumanity to his fellows: In Tarzan and the Ant Men (1924), he shows how the tiny Minunians go to war because of

patriotic ideas, not the "chicanery of politics" or the "thinly veiled ambition of some potential tyrant," or the "captains of the outer world who send unwilling men to battle for they know not what, deceived by lying propaganda, enraged by false tales of the barbarity of the foe." In Tarzan of the Apes, Burroughs comments how the ape-man "killed for food most often, but, being a man, he sometimes killed for pleasure, a thing which no other animal does; for it has remained for man alone among all creatures to kill senselessly and wantonly for the mere pleasure of inflicting suffering and death."

Social Sensitivity

Politically, Burroughs's views reflected the conservative ideas of his time. He distrusted communism, and his early villains were often Russians (ironically, his books later became extremely popular in the Soviet Union). In the 1930s, his extreme anti-German sentiments hurt his foreign sales, and Burroughs attempted to tone down his consistent use of foreign villains. As he grew older, Burroughs came to emphasize the brutality and waste of war for war's sake, deploring this instance of "civilized" man's inhumanity to his fellows. In Tarzan of the Apes, Burroughs comments that the ape-man "killed for food most often, but, being a man, he sometimes killed for pleasure, a thing which no other animal does; for it has remained for man alone among all creatures to kill senselessly and wantonly for the mere pleasure of inflicting suffering and death."

Techniques

As the characters recur, so do the plots. Burroughs wrote quickly, with a firm knowledge of what his readers wanted. In 1913, his peak year, he wrote over 400,000 words; he usually spent from one to three months on a novel, rarely rewriting except to accede to an editor's request. According to Lupoff, "His speed record for a full novel was set on Carson of Venus (1939), produced in twenty-six days," while the good Warlord of Mars (1919) took thirty days. Writing at such speed meant the use of episodic plots in which coincidences abound and logic usually disappears. Mutinies, shipwrecks, menacing beasts, sojourns in lost cities (usually paired and at war), kidnappings, rescues, chases, and wars provide all the incidents needed to keep Tarzan (and John Carter, Carson Napier, and David Innes) extremely busy. Burroughs also became adept at the cliffhanger ending — as evidenced by the conclusion of the first Tarzan novel — which called for a sequel.

Since the novels were originally serialized in magazines and newspapers, most seem to break naturally into novelette-length episodes even when originally conceived of as unified wholes.

Yet this haste also produces a certain breathlessness in Burroughs's writing that carries the reader uncritically along. Even his strongest critics admit his ability to tell a fast-paced story.

Burroughs often understates even big action scenes, focusing instead on telling details that stimulate the reader's imagination into filling in missing descriptions; some fights take mere paragraphs, and the next threatening situation builds immediately. New thrills and strange new creatures engage the reader before he can even contemplate the coincidences.

A final recurring technique involves Burroughs's use of a frame story to establish the reality of the tale. Usually this situation concerns a character, often identified as "Burroughs," receiving a manuscript or message carrying the story. So Tarzan of the Apes begins, "I had this story from one who had no business to tell it to me, or to any other," and the narrator pieces together the account from various sources, including the nameless storyteller and the actual diary of John Clayton. The frame story of The Eternal Lover (1925), a nonseries adventure set in both modern and prehistoric times, takes place at the Greystoke estate, "my having chanced to be a guest of Tarzan's, making it possible for me to give you a story that otherwise might never have been told." These frames provide the most reality to tales weak in plotting, dialogue, and character development.

Literary Qualities

Just as many of the characters in the Tarzan series recur from book to book, so too do the plots. Burroughs wrote quickly, with a firm knowledge of what pleased his readers. He usually spent from one to three months on a novel, rarely rewriting except to accede to an editor's request. Writing at such speed almost necessitated the use of episodic plots, in which coincidences abound and logic usually disappears. Mutinies, shipwrecks, menacing beasts, sojourns in lost cities, kidnappings, rescues, chases, and wars pop up again and again. Burroughs also became adept at the cliffhanger ending; the ending of Tarzan of the Apes, in which Tarzan and Jane are separated, called out for a sequel. Since the novels were originally serialized in magazines and newspapers, most seem to break naturally into novelette-length episodes.

A recurring technique in the series is Burroughs's use of a frame story to establish his tale's credibility. These scenes lend a touch of reality to tales weak in plotting, dialogue, and character development. Throughout the series, an outside character—often identified as "Burroughs"—will receive a telling manuscript or message. Thus Tarzan of the Apes begins, "I had this story from one who had no business to tell it to me, or to any other"; the narrator proceeds to piece together an account of the apeman, drawing on various sources.

It seems likely that Burroughs's ideas came from popular fiction of the time and from common myths. When pressed to name sources for his Tarzan legend, Burroughs mentioned the ancient legend of Romulus and Remus, the mythic founders of Rome who were suckled by a she-wolf as children. The popular fiction of Burroughs's early life included the action tales of Jules Verne—including Journey to the Centre of the Earth and From the Earth to the Moon—and later, of H. G. Wells and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The romances of Kipling and H. Rider Haggard suggested the notion of lost African empires to Burroughs, who wrote a British newspaper in 1931, "To Mr. Kipling and Mr. Haggard I owe a debt of gratitude for having stimulated my youthful imagination."

Burroughs was also familiar with the naturalist writings of Frank Norris and Jack London, both of whom examined the subconscious primitive nature of humankind in their work. Burroughs, however, reverses the naturalist creed; where Norris and London saw humans reverting to the bestial, Burroughs showed that honor, chivalry, justice, heroism, and love are inherent in the character of the savage.

Themes

While Burroughs reiterates the ideas of the "noble savage" — the possibility of natural goodness, strength, and superiority inherent in mankind even though brought up in violent Nature— and the evolutionary progress of civilization, including its less praiseworthy manifestations, he also comments upon "the rise of civilization, during which mankind gained much in its never-ending search for luxury; but not without the sacrifice of many desirable characteristics, as well as the greater part of its liberty." The Burroughs books are escapist literature in many senses, for not only do they provide a means of escape from the harsh, real world (of a Depression and two world wars — the pulp magazines, after all, were a mass entertainment medium equivalent to modern television), but they also celebrate, like American writers such as James Fenimore Cooper, Mark Twain, and Ernest Hemingway, an escape from the world of conventional and superficial restriction into a world of freedom and action, where an heroic figure can triumph over the perils of man and nature. Tarzan finds in the jungle a world of danger where he depends solely on his own physical and mental powers. In a jungle outpost on the outskirts of civilization with d'Arnot, Tarzan accepts a wager to kill a lion with knife and rope, and returns gratefully to the jungle: "it was with a feeling of exultant freedom that he swung once more through the forest branches.

This was life! ah, how he loved it!

Civilization held nothing like this in its narrow and circumscribed sphere, hemmed in by restrictions and conventionalities. Even clothes were a hinderance and a nuisance. At last he was free. He had not realized what a prisoner he had been."

The conception of Tarzan thus functions as both theme and character in the novels. In exercising his abilities, Tarzan serves as a model of the ideal man. His supreme confidence in his physical and mental abilities, assures his remaining triumphant, invincible, lord of the jungle, untamed, terrible, and magnificent, as the titles of the later books suggest. His grace, speed, strength, and skill match his cunning, reasoning, resourcefulness, and adaptability to produce a super-man able to function effectively in any situation, indeed any world (as a later trip to the Earth's Core suggests). To a query about his reasons for writing, Burroughs replied: Of course the primary motive of a story like Tarzan of the Apes is to entertain, yet in writing this and other stories I have been considerably influenced by the hope that they might carry a beneficial suggestion of the value of physical perfection and morality. Because Tarzan led a clean, active, outdoor life he was able to accomplish mental as well as physical feats that are so beyond the average man that he cannot believe in their possibility, and if that idea takes root in the mind of but a single young man, to the end that he endeavors through similar means to rise above his environment, then Tarzan of the Apes will not have lived in vain.

Other equally simple themes recur throughout Burroughs's works. Foremost among these is the power of love, as depicted in the perfect physical and mental union of Tarzan and Jane Porter. His love for her tames his savagery (and releases his romantic chivalry and self-sacrifice) — while her love for him releases some of the natural

instincts repressed by society; after Tarzan kills Terkoz, "it was a primeval woman who sprang forward with outstretched arms toward the primeval man who had fought for her and won her." And later, after being rescued from the forest fire, Jane reflects that her attraction "seemed to her only attributable to a temporary mental reversion to type on her part — to the psychological appeal of the primeval man to the primeval woman in her nature." The love theme also motivates the constant search and rescue sequences that serve for plot in most of the books. In addition, Burroughs comments on the despoiling of nature by man, the barbarity of hunting, and the sexist superiority of the male. (In Tarzan and the Ant Men he teaches the effete young men of a matriarchal tribe how to use weapons to regain their power.) On a more personal level, Burroughs inveighs against lawyers and the ineptitude of the motion picture industry: in Tarzan and the Lion Man (1934), Lord Greystoke himself auditions for the role as Tarzan but is rejected as "not the type."

Adaptations

Tarzan's extraordinary popularity derives as much from his appearances in media other than Burroughs's books.

Nearly fifty authorized Tarzan movies have appeared, with some twenty actors portraying the ape-man, beginning with Elmo Lincoln in the 1918 silent classic, one of the first films to gross over a million dollars. The twelve movies from 1932 to 1948 starring Olympic swimmer Johnny Weissmuller and, originally, Maureen O'Sullivan as Jane, became the most popular. Burroughs disliked the films, primarily because of the portrayal of the ape-man as semiarticulate and uncultured, but the Weissmuller image has continued to dominate the public perception. Burroughs mocked the films in Tarzan and the Lion Man, and, later, in Tarzan and "The Foreign Legion": when Col. John Clayton reveals his famous identity to the R.A.F. crew with whom he has been serving, the incredulous gunner from Chicago comments, "Is dat Johnny Weis[s]muller?" Burroughs was more fortunate in his book illustrators which included the American artist N. C. Wyeth, J. Allen St. John, and, finally, his own son, John Coleman Burroughs; more recently, Frank Frazetta gained much of his fame by illustrating the early paperback reissues.

Under the direction of Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc., Tarzan came to radio in 1931, with the author's daughter and son-in-law playing the leading roles in what was the first prerecorded, syndicated radio series; over 350 fifteen-minute shows were sold to stations in every state, in Europe and in South America. In 1932, a syndicated comic strip began appearing in newspapers, a strip which continues to this day; the original artist was Hal Foster, whose powerful drawings and imaginative placing of text (which continued to develop in "Prince Valiant") had immediate appeal. Later, the intensely physical drawings of Burne Hogarth increased the popularity, and these early strips have become collectors' items. In 1936, Tarzan appeared in comic books, receiving his own comic in 1947, a series which also still continues. Burroughs also licensed his registered trademark to manufacturers of clothing, watches, masks, candy, toys, records and numerous other articles; Gabe Essoe even reports that in 1943 over three million loaves of Tarzan bread were sold. Tarzan came to television in 1966 in the person of Ron Ely for a three-year run of popular and well-produced hour-long episodes which attracted generally good reviews; some episodes became feature films shown abroad. It has been estimated that a Tarzan movie is being shown somewhere in the world at any given moment. In all these efforts, Burroughs or Burroughs, Inc., had some hand, and it is little wonder that the literary character has become so engrained in the public consciousness.

In 1984 director Hugh Hudson released one of the few Tarzan movies that remained faithful to the original character created by Burroughs. Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes (1984) opens with the shipwreck and Tarzan's ultimate adoption by the animals. After just enough footage in the jungle to establish Tarzan's credibility as an apeman, the film takes a dramatic leap from West Africa back to Scotland, where Tarzan, the seventh Earl of Greystoke, claims his title. In one of the

best films to reexamine the man vs. nature theme, this story places the purity of Tarzan, who has been uncorrupted by other people, against the hypocrisy of Victorian society and the ultimate dark end of Tarzan's attempt to be more man than ape.

Topics for Discussion

1. Why is Tarzan so successful as a member of ape society?

2. Does Burroughs portray Jane as Tarzan's equal? Are there any ways in which she is better equipped for life in the jungle than he is? Are there any ways in which he is better equipped for life in civilization than she is?

3. Analyze the character of Kala, Tarzan's ape mother. Which of her attributes make her most resemble a human?

4. What are Tarzan's feelings about his natural parents?

5. Why does Tarzan return to the jungle at the end of Tarzan of the Apes?

6. How realistic is Burroughs's description of the jungle? Is there any factual information you would change if you updated his book today?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Read Rudyard Kipling's Jungle Book (1894). How does Mowgli's upbringing in the wild compare to Tarzan's?

2. View the 1984 film Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes, which is available on videotape. How does it compare to Burroughs's original work? If you can find one of the Johnny Weissmuller Tarzan films, view it also. How does it compare to Burroughs's work? To Greystoke?

3. Burroughs wrote twenty-four novels about Tarzan. Read one of the Tarzan books that was published after 1940, and compare the characterization of Tarzan in the later work with that of Tarzan of the Apes.

4. Read one of Burroughs's books about Barsoom, or Mars. Is John Carter, the hero of this series, at all similar to Tarzan? In what ways does the Martian environment resemble the jungle of the Tarzan books?

5. The two strongest female presences in Tarzan of the Apes are Kala, Tarzan's ape mother, and Jane, Tarzan's human love interest. Compare these characters. What does each one provide for Tarzan? What does each one see in Tarzan that initially attracts her to him?

Literary Precedents

Tracing specific literary sources may not be particularly valuable, for Burroughs was not a literary man — according to Porges, Burroughs thought that Owen Wister's The Virginian (1902) was among the greatest American novels. While some literary works, such as Gulliver's Travels (Jonathan Swift, 1726) as a source for the Ant Men, seem fairly obvious, and Lupoff's book finds some interesting parallels in long-forgotten science-fiction works, it seems more likely that his ideas came from common myths and from popular fiction itself. In commenting on the origins of Tarzan, Burroughs mentioned having read Kipling's Mowgli stories, but most often he referred to ancient legends such as Romulus and Remus for examples of children raised by animals (and becoming mythical). The popular fiction of Burroughs's early life, however, included such models as the dime novels for action entertainment; the tales of Jules Verne, including Journey to the Center of the Earth (1864) and From the Earth to the Moon (1865), and, later, of H. G. Wells and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, including The First Men in the Moon (1901) and The Lost World (1912), for imaginative science fiction; and the romances of H. Rider Haggard for African lost empires. Burroughs wrote a British newspaper in 1931: "To Mr. Kipling and Mr. Haggard I owe a debt of gratitude for having stimulated my youthful imagination." For notions about the subconscious primitive nature of man, Burroughs would also have been familiar with the work of naturalists such as Frank Norris and Jack London — he considered writing a biography of the latter, the author of The Sea Wolf (1904) and Before Adam (1906). Burroughs, however, reverses the naturalist creed: Where they saw men reverting to the bestial, Burroughs showed the best elements of humanity — honor, chivalry, justice, heroism, love — inherent in the savage, along with the best, not worst, qualities of the primitive.

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Related Titles

Direct sequels to Tarzan of the Apes include The Return of Tarzan and The Beasts of Tarzan (1916). Twenty-one other adult Tarzan books appeared, the most interesting of which include Jungle Tales of Tarzan (stories); Tarzan and the Ant Men; and Tarzan and The Foreign Legion. Probably the last Tarzan book is Tarzan: The Lost Adventure (1996) compiled from notes that Burroughs left by Joe R. Lansdale. This Tarzan is in the dark spirit of the Burroughs sequels.

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