

# Review of edgar rice burrough's book, tarzan of the apes with focus on white supr...

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Walt Disney once made a film called Tarzan, a film which was highly notable at it's prime and still is today. Ranking as #44 on the highest-grossing animated films of all time ( " Top US Grossing"), it was based off of Edgar Rice Burrough's book Tarzan of the Apes. Author Edgar Rice Burroughs promotes white supremacy in World War 1 in the realistic novel Tarzan of the Apes

Written and published in the Early 20th Century, Tarzan of the Apes embodies the characteristics of the literary eras Realism, Naturalism, and Modernism. According to author Josh Rahn, realism is " An attention to detail and effort to replicate the nature of reality in a way novelists have not attempted" (Rahn " Realism"). For example, when Tarzan opens the door to the cabin, he sees a book about the alphabet, which he has a fascination for, and a knife. though, regardless of his fascination of the alphabet, he discards the book and takes the knife instead.

Tarzan's decision to take the knife was based on realistic circumstances such as the fact that he was raised in a jungle for his entire life with no exposure to anything that is considered " human". Considering that a knife is necessary to obtain the skills required to live in a jungle, and a book about the alphabet is deemed useless, Tarzan would have obviously taken the knife because common sense calls for it in his situation. Another literary era present in this novel is Naturalism, one which " sought to identify the underlying causes for a persons actions and beliefs" (Rahn " Naturalism").

When Sabor attacks with a " wild scream" Tarzan jumps into the water and learns to swim out of necessity, but unlike the other apes, Tarzan develops a love for swimming. Since Tarzan lives with apes that learned to swim for <https://assignbuster.com/review-of-edgar-rice-burroughs-book-tarzan-of-the-apes-with-focus-on-white-supremacism/>

survival as opposed to enjoyment, Tarzan is different from his peers. This difference is hereditary since there are no external forces telling him that swimming can be for enjoyment. Another era present in this novel is Modernism, which not only was a time where traditional ideals were rejected, but also “ a time of privilege for wealthy Caucasian males” (Rahn “ Modernism”). For example, Tarzan boasts about his adventures in killing a boar to Kerchak's tribe. Over time he learns how to use a bow and arrow and eventually destroys Kerchak with it, eventually becoming king of the jungle. Through the rapid time progression when this instance takes place, Tarzan asserts his dominance to everyone in the jungle. Tarzan gains his dominance in the book because although he is a “ savage” , he is also a Caucasian male, therefore suggesting that he has more privileges than the Africans or the apes. The representation of each literary era is justified through these characteristics.

Edgar Rice Burroughs attended a half-dozen public schools and private schools before finally graduating in 1895 from Michigan Military Academy. At about the same time, he enlisted as a private in the Seventh U. S. Cavalry. After taking up several careers such as a cowboy, a shopkeeper, a railroad policeman, and a gold miner, he eventually became dirt poor. One day, he was selling pencil sharpeners. Realizing that this career wouldn't suffice, he started writing what became his first novel *Under the Moon and Mars*. This eventually led him to his big break as an author. In 1912, He published *Tarzan of the Apes*. In 1919, He moved to California and purchased the 550 acre estate of General Harrison Gray Otis, renaming it “ Tarzana Ranch”.

Since the publication of the book, over 41 Tarzan movies and 57 one-hour television episodes have been produced. (" ERB Biography.").

Several reasons are attributed to Burrough's promotion of white supremacy throughout the book. John Taliaferro, author of *Tarzan Forever* states that " ERB's blood was not entirely Yankee, in fact, he tried to play down the fact that his mother's father was a Pennsylvanian Dutch" (Taliaferro 27). Rather, " he preferred to stress relatives such as Mary Evangeline Zieger Burroughs who had settled in virginia in the Eighteenth Century" (Taliaferro 27). Since Burroughs was ashamed of his heritage, he expresses these feelings in the book by glorifying the notion that Tarzan is white and that the white man is always the ruler of the kingdom. Author Michael Lind on the other hand justifies Burrough's use of white supremacy by arguing that it was " central to Burrough's conception of the character" (Lind 1). In the middle of the book, Tarzan gains victory through the use of a hunting knife while killing Kerchak. As Burrough's words it in the book, " Thus came the young Lord Greystroke into the kingship of the apes" (Burroughs 119). This incident gives Tarzan a sense of heroism, one that is shown over and over throughout the book; incidents that repeat over and over again, otherwise known as " motifs" contribute greatly to the conception of the character. Through this, white supremacy is glorified. Another author, Phil Shannon claims that Burroughs himself had no knowledge about Africa. Shannon states that " According to his ' colonial imagination', blacks are ' Brutish savages' " (Shannon). This uneducated statement is reflected in Burrough's writing, as the Africans in the book are portrayed as brutish savages. Of course, the white supremacy shown throughout the book could be completely

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unintentional, but use was still inevitable. These reasons justify why Burroughs uses, promotes, and glorifies white supremacy in Tarzan of the Apes.

Literary Critics argue that Burroughs promotes white supremacy through common stereotypes and the conception of Tarzan himself. Literary Critic Richard Lupoff argues that Burroughs, portrays African Americans “ in the comic darky vein in Tarzan of the Apes as well as several other novels” (Lupoff 161-62). For example, after Tarzan becomes king of the apes, he starts stealing the food of the African Tribe next to him. But when the “ savages” returned, instead of thinking that someone stole the food, they thought that the spirits have taken it and that it is a blessing. A stereotype existing since the early 15th century, Burroughs implies that if one has dark skin, then he/she is stupid. Burroughs associates the African tribe with the slaves in the 1600s suggesting that both groups are stupid. Author Tom Henninghan argues that despite his struggles, “ Tarzan himself refrains his godlike integrity” (Henninghan 261-63). Author Phillip Howerton supports this claim, asserting that the reason for this is because “ Tarzan's genetics make him a lord of any society.” (Howerton). His genetics promotes white supremacy, the idea that the white man is superior to all races. His genetics also fit the conception of the character. Through literary criticism, Tarzan of the Apes is shown to have used a great deal of white supremacy in the novel through the use of stereotypes and as well as through the conception of Tarzan as a character.

Since he published his book Tarzan television programs are syndicated to over 200 TV stations in the U. S. A Tarzan Movie plays somewhere in almost every country of the world almost everyday (" ERB Biography"). Through the promotion of white supremacy in Tarzan of the Apes, Burroughs finally gained the critical acclaim that he was denied in his lifetime.