

tarzan of the apes by edgar rice burroughs

Tarzan of the Apes is a classic novel penned by Edgar Rice Burroughs, first published in 1912. It introduces readers to the legendary character of Tarzan, a man raised by apes in the depths of the African jungle. The story explores themes of identity, civilization versus savagery, and the innate connection between humans and nature. With its rich narrative and vibrant characters, "Tarzan of the Apes" has become a significant part of popular culture and has inspired numerous adaptations in film, television, and literature.

Background of the Novel

When Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote "Tarzan of the Apes," he was a struggling writer with a vivid imagination and a penchant for adventure. The novel was serialized in the magazine "All-Story" in 1912 before being published as a book. Burroughs drew from his own experiences and interests in anthropology, wildlife, and adventure stories, crafting a tale that resonated with the cultural zeitgeist of early 20th-century America.

Influences and Inspirations

Several influences shaped Burroughs' creation of Tarzan:

1. Adventure Literature: Burroughs was inspired by the works of writers like H. Rider Haggard, whose tales of exploration and adventure in exotic lands set the stage for the genre.
2. Anthropology and Evolution: The early 20th century was a time of fascination with evolutionary theory, which influenced Burroughs' portrayal of Tarzan as a product of both human and animal instincts.
3. Personal Experiences: Burroughs' own travels and interests in wildlife fueled his imagination, allowing him to create a vivid and believable jungle setting.

Plot Overview

The plot of "Tarzan of the Apes" follows the life of John Clayton, the Earl of Greystoke, who is marooned in the African jungle with his wife, Alice, after their ship is attacked by mutineers. The couple dies shortly after giving birth to their son, who is discovered and adopted by a tribe of apes known as the Mangani. The young boy, named Tarzan by the apes, grows up learning the ways of the jungle, developing incredible physical abilities and a deep connection with the animals around him.

As Tarzan matures, he grapples with his identity, torn between his primal instincts and the vestiges of his human heritage. His journey of self-discovery leads him to encounter other humans, including the beautiful Jane Porter, who will play a crucial role in his understanding of love and civilization.

Key Events

The novel is punctuated by several key events that shape Tarzan's identity and fate:

- Discovery of the Treehouse: Tarzan discovers his parents' treehouse, which contains books and artifacts from the outside world. This discovery sparks his intellectual curiosity and deepens his understanding of human culture.
- First Encounter with Humans: Tarzan's first meeting with humans occurs when he rescues Jane and her party from a band of hostile natives. This moment marks the beginning of his transition from the jungle to civilization.
- Conflict with Other Men: Throughout the story, Tarzan faces various conflicts with other humans, including the villainous Clayton and the opportunistic businessman, Mr. Philander. These encounters highlight the tension between civilization and the primal world he knows.

Character Analysis

The characters in "Tarzan of the Apes" are richly developed and serve as vehicles for exploring the novel's central themes.

Tarzan

Tarzan is the epitome of the noble savage, a character who embodies the strengths and weaknesses of both human and animal instincts. His physical prowess and adaptability in the jungle contrast sharply with his naivety and vulnerability when confronted with the complexities of human society. Tarzan's journey reflects the struggle to reconcile his primal heritage with the expectations of civilization.

Jane Porter

Jane Porter represents the civilized world that Tarzan is drawn to yet remains alien to him. As a character, she embodies grace, intelligence, and independence, challenging the traditional roles of women in early 20th-century literature. Her relationship with Tarzan evolves from fascination to deep love, symbolizing the bridge between nature and civilization.

Supporting Characters

Several supporting characters enrich the narrative:

- Professor Archimedes Q. Porter: Jane's father, a bumbling yet endearing character who provides comic relief and represents the intellectual aspect of civilization.
- William Cecil Clayton: The antagonist who seeks to claim Jane and Tarzan's inheritance, serving as a foil to Tarzan's noble character.

- The Apes: The Mangani tribe, led by Kerchak, are critical in shaping Tarzan's upbringing and serve as a reminder of his primal roots.

Themes and Motifs

"Tarzan of the Apes" is steeped in various themes and motifs that resonate throughout the narrative.

Civilization vs. Savagery

One of the novel's central themes is the conflict between civilization and savagery. Tarzan's life in the jungle represents the untamed aspects of humanity, while his encounters with civilization expose the hypocrisy and moral complexities of human society. Burroughs raises questions about what it means to be "civilized" and whether the trappings of culture are inherently superior to the instincts of the natural world.

Identity and Self-Discovery

Tarzan's journey is one of self-discovery as he grapples with his dual identity as both a man and an ape. His quest for knowledge and understanding of his heritage is a universal theme, reflecting the human desire to belong and find one's place in the world.

Nature and the Primitive World

The lush, vibrant jungle serves as a character in its own right, symbolizing the raw beauty and danger of the natural world. Burroughs paints a vivid picture of the flora and fauna, emphasizing the interconnectedness of all living beings. This motif invites readers to consider humanity's relationship with nature and the often-destructive impact of civilization on the environment.

Impact and Legacy

The impact of "Tarzan of the Apes" extends far beyond its initial publication. The character of Tarzan has become a cultural icon, inspiring countless adaptations in various forms of media.

Adaptations

1. Film: Tarzan has been portrayed in over 100 films, with notable adaptations including the 1999 animated Disney film and the live-action versions starring Johnny Weissmuller and Alexander Skarsgård.
2. Television: The character has appeared in numerous television series, including "Tarzan" (1966)

and "The Legend of Tarzan" (2001).

3. Comics and Novels: The character has inspired a range of comic book adaptations and sequel novels, further expanding the Tarzan mythos.

Cultural Significance

Tarzan's enduring popularity can be attributed to his embodiment of the archetypal hero who navigates the complexities of identity, love, and survival. The themes of the novel continue to resonate with contemporary audiences, prompting discussions about the intersection of nature and civilization, as well as the exploration of identity in a rapidly changing world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tarzan of the Apes by Edgar Rice Burroughs is more than just an adventure story; it is a profound exploration of identity, civilization, and humanity's relationship with nature. Through Tarzan's journey from the jungle to civilization, readers are invited to reflect on their own identities and the complexities of the world around them. The novel's impact on literature and popular culture is undeniable, ensuring that the legend of Tarzan will endure for generations to come. As readers delve into this timeless tale, they will find not just the story of a man raised by apes, but a rich tapestry of themes that speak to the very essence of what it means to be human.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of 'Tarzan of the Apes'?

The central theme revolves around the conflict between civilization and nature, exploring identity, belonging, and the innate instincts of humanity.

Who are the main characters in 'Tarzan of the Apes'?

The main characters include Tarzan, Jane Porter, and Clayton, as well as Tarzan's ape mother, Kala, and the antagonist, Paulvitch.

How does Tarzan's upbringing influence his character?

Tarzan's upbringing among apes shapes his physical abilities and instincts, but also creates a conflict when he encounters human society, highlighting his struggle between two worlds.

What literary techniques does Edgar Rice Burroughs use in 'Tarzan of the Apes'?

Burroughs employs vivid descriptions, adventure narrative style, and contrasting settings to enhance the story's themes and character development.

In what ways does 'Tarzan of the Apes' challenge societal norms?

The novel challenges norms by depicting Tarzan, a 'noble savage', as more morally grounded and physically capable than the civilized characters, questioning the values of Western society.

What impact did 'Tarzan of the Apes' have on popular culture?

The novel established Tarzan as an iconic character in literature and media, leading to numerous adaptations in films, comics, and merchandise, influencing the adventure genre.

How does the relationship between Tarzan and Jane evolve throughout the novel?

Their relationship evolves from initial curiosity and misunderstanding to deep love and mutual respect, highlighting themes of connection and cultural differences.

What role do the apes play in Tarzan's development?

The apes play a crucial role in Tarzan's development, teaching him survival skills and nurturing his instincts, representing his connection to nature and primal origins.

What is the significance of Tarzan's dual heritage?

Tarzan's dual heritage as both human and ape symbolizes the struggle between civilization and primal instincts, emphasizing the complexity of identity and belonging.

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