

# EDGARDEMAIN

John Martin

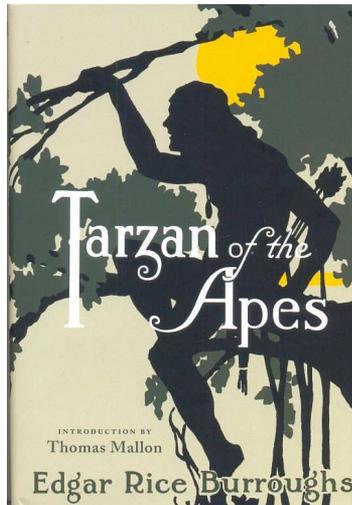
*A slightly different version of this review article regarding the Library of America Tarzan of the Apes and A Princess of Mars editions appeared in*

ERBapa Spring 2012

Nice books, but...

The Library of America<sup>1</sup> has published new editions of *Tarzan of the Apes* and *A Princess of Mars*. Both are very similar in layout and design to the first editions, with the original dust jacket cover art, though with modifications in type placement and style.

There's a lot to like about these editions but, unfortunately, there is



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<sup>1</sup> A 501(c)(3) non-profit publisher. Not affiliated with the U.S. Government.

also something to dislike, and that is primarily the introduction by Junot Diaz to *A Princess of Mars*.

But, first the (mostly) good news:

## *TARZAN OF THE APES*

The title lettering on the wraparound DJ<sup>2</sup> is in white letters on the middle of the cover, across the tree limb, leaves and Tarzan's thigh, instead of at the top of the cover. The words "Introduction by Thomas Mallon"<sup>3</sup> appear near the bottom, right above the name of Edgar Rice Burroughs. The front endflap has a promo of the story; the back flap has a brief bio of ERB. The DJ is printed on high-quality paper which seems to be slightly thicker than the average book DJ.

The book itself is bound in green cloth with white lettering, and looks somewhat similar to either a Burt or G&D reprint, although of much better quality.

There are endpapers, printed in light green, at both the front and back, each depicting a different jungle scene (trees, vegetation, etc.)

The first printed page has a list of ERB's novels.

The title page has a smaller black and white of the DJ art of the Tarzan in the tree silhouette.

There is a 12-page introduction by Mallon.

The type for the story has been reset.

At the back is a 20-page section titled "A Century of Tarzan" which lists dates of major milestones, such as years of publication of different books, releases of different movies, comic books, etc.

This is followed by a four-page article describing the process of publishing the first copies of Tarzan in

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<sup>2</sup> Dust Jacket

<sup>3</sup> Novelist, critic, Director of the Creative Writing Program at The George Washington University.

*All-Story Magazine* and by A.C. McClurg. The article is titled "Tarzan's Debut: A Historical Note."

That is followed by a three page "About the Author" and that by one paragraph about Mallon on the page following.

## A PRINCESS OF MARS

The cover lettering of the title is at the bottom of the cover instead of the top, as in the original. Also, the cover illustration, of John Carter defending Dejah Thoris, is slightly reduced from the original, so that it has white borders. A red circle, symbolizing the planet Mars, appears behind the "s" in Princess and the "of." The red circle is also behind the title lettering on the spine of the book.

Burroughs' name is below the title and "Introduction by Junot Diaz" is below that.

On the back of the DJ is one of the interior illustrations reprinted in full-color. It is the illustration with the caption: "*She drew upon the marble floor the first map of the Barsoomian territory I had ever seen.*" Above the illustration is a quote from Diaz's review. The front endflap of the DJ is about the book and the rear endflap is about the author. The DJ is printed on high-quality paper, slightly thicker than most book jackets.

The cover of the book itself is in all-red cloth with a slightly indented red circle beneath the words "*A Princess of Mars.*"

There are red endpapers at the front and back of the book with designs that look similar to pictures of the red planet with the criss-crossing "canal" lines. The two endpapers are different in the "canals" they depict.

The first printed page has a list of ERB's books.

The frontispiece is the same art as the DJ image. There are four other illustrations in the book, including the "map of Barsoom" illustration that is also printed, in color, on the DJ. The interior illustrations are in black and white. The illustrations are not on slick paper. However, all of the pages in the book, as well as in *Tarzan of the Apes*, appear to be of extra high quality.

The title page has a gray circle representing Mars, printed behind the M in Mars.

Junot Diaz's introduction, at 40 pages, is almost novelette size. It's so long that it's divided into "chapters."

In the back of the book is a nine-page feature, "A Century of John Carter," which shows dates of major publishing, comic book dates and other events, concluding with the date of release of the movie, John Carter. It is interesting to look at these dates and realize that John Carter has actually gotten a lot of exposure throughout the last century, not just in the first half of it.

"John Carter's Debut: A Historical Note" is a four-page article that tells how the story first got published in magazine and book form.

That is followed by a three-page ERB bio and that by a one-paragraph background of Junot Diaz.

## LISTS OF ERB BOOKS

About the lists of ERB books in the front of both *Tarzan of the Apes* and *A Princess of Mars*: I don't think I have ever seen a "list of ERB's books" that I can't find something wrong with! This list shows 58 books that were published in ERB's lifetime and 13 more that were published posthumously. I haven't analyzed the lists in depth, but certain things pop out. In the posthumous

section, *The Girl from Farris's* is listed, but not *The Efficiency Expert*.<sup>4</sup> It would seem that if one knew about one, one would know about the other! *Wizard of Venus* is listed twice, in a way, because *Tales of Three Planets* is listed along with the paperback *Wizard of Venus*. Probably they did this so they could include *Pirate Blood* in parentheses, since that story is included in the Ace paperback edition. *Marcia of the Doorstep* is listed, but not *You Lucky Girl!* I don't see a listing for either *The Scientists' Revolt* or *Beware!*<sup>5</sup> *Tarzan: The Lost Adventure* was also listed, which I suppose is okay, since Burroughs gets author credit, though his unfinished novel underwent significant rewrite and expansion by Joe Lansdale.

## DIAZ'S CONVOLUTED INTRO TO *PRINCESS OF MARS*

What is the purpose of the introduction to a book? I suppose it is to introduce the author and his work and give the reader some insight into the novel. That's a pretty broad definition and it leaves room for all kinds of finagling by whoever is chosen to write the introduction. There



have been introductions written by people who liked the author and/or his story, and introductions by people who didn't. Junot Diaz seems to fall into the latter cate-

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<sup>4</sup> *Efficiency Expert* was published serially in *All-Story* Oct 8-29, 1921

<sup>5</sup> *Beware!* was the original story, written in 1922. Editor Ray Palmer changed *Beware!* into *The Scientists' Revolt* for the July 1939 issue of *Fantastic Adventures*

gory. Diaz makes it clear from his very first sentence that he isn't particularly enamored of the works of ERB and it goes downhill from there. Perhaps quite by accident, he makes a couple of remarks about the book which make it sound as if he's promoting it. The publisher capitalized on these by using one quote—

“*A Princess of Mars* is singularly important ... in that it innovated the grammar for the American version of the lost world romance”

—on its website, and, on the back of the book itself, appeared another quote:

“*A Princess of Mars* is a New World Conquest turned Western turned Lost Race romance turned Indian Captivity narrative turned swashbuckler turned eugenics parable.... It's a kaleidoscopic mash-up to end all kaleidoscopic mash-ups and yet despite all this whirl of disparate influences the damn thing holds together.”

Some may disagree that the latter quote is positive. However, compared to just about everything else written by Diaz in his 40-page jumble in the jungle, it sounds like something Diaz would write if nominating the book for the Pulitzer Prize!

Diaz is an award-winning novelist<sup>6</sup> himself and is a creative writing instructor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (they probably need to train people who will write technological journals with some creativity, so it won't make boring reading).

Diaz blames ERB and his stories for just about every wrong done to anyone in society and his particu-

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<sup>6</sup> Diaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* received the 2008 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction

lar prejudice is against anyone who is white and happens to be successful in any fictional account which embraces people of other races as minor characters. Obviously, ERB's plots fit Diaz's outlook to a T, particularly on Mars, where white John Carter is pitted against people of just about every hue under the Barsoomian moons.

He starts off, though, by placing a deprecatory aside into his opening sentence about ERB himself

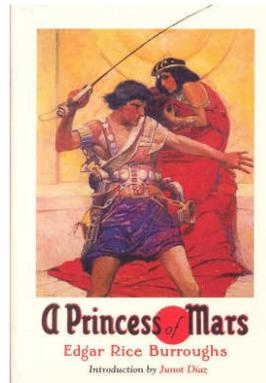
“Pulp writer Edgar Rice Burroughs is usually remembered, when he's remembered at all, for his most popular creation: Tarzan of the Apes.”

In no time at all, though, he casts subtlety aside and refers to ERB as a “rootless doof.”

Next, he takes on John Carter as “a Western genre homoerotic wet dream” and scoffs at ERB's account that the slaves on the family's plantation “fairly worshipped the ground he trod.” Diaz adds, of these fictional slaves: “though what they thought of him after Emancipation is anyone's guess.”

When he's not picking on ERB for his supposed “racial shenanigans,” he's lamenting the fact that ERB exploited the “myth of the frontier,” which was “the cornerstone of white masculinity and the master script that helped explain, justify, and energize the West's conquest of the Darker Nations.”

Besides “white masculinity,” Diaz's rant continually uses terms such as “white man,” “white hero,”



and the one-word “whiteman,” which is a racist term, to describe John Carter and other ERB heroes.

He doesn’t limit himself to criticizing ERB only, he also drags in fiction such as *Dune*, *Shogun*, *Rambo*, *Star Trek* and anything with John Wayne in it. Besides ERB, he picks on others who either promoted the “frontier myth” or who have admitted they were somewhat influenced by ERB—people such as Teddy Roosevelt, H. Rider Haggard, Kevin Costner, James Cameron and even Carl Sagan.

As for ERB himself, Diaz labels him as “someone who spent an inordinate amount of time trying to reach the sentimental frontier of his boyhood.” I guess Diaz doesn’t believe that ERB originally wrote these stories not to realize his boyhood dreams of being a “white hero,” but in a desperate attempt to find some way of supporting his family.<sup>7</sup> I suppose Diaz would also see something such as ERB’s service in the press corps in World War II as merely another attempt on ERB’s part to find glory on his own “frontier.”

There apparently is no depth to which Diaz will not sink in his introductory diatribe. In Part 6 of his treatise, he accuses ERB of “slumming” in his writing. Diaz once again points his self-righteous finger only at white people,” who “slum” by making “nighttime forays into urban centers marked as racially and culturally other for the expressed purpose of ‘pleasure-seeking’

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<sup>7</sup> Reflecting on his experience growing up in America and working his way through college in 2010, Díaz said: "I can safely say I've seen the US from the bottom up...I may be a success story as an individual. But if you adjust the knob and just take it back one setting to the family unit, I would say my family tells a much more complicated story. It tells the story of two kids in prison. It tells the story of enormous poverty, of tremendous difficulty." [Wikipedia: Junot Diaz](#)

among these racial and culture others’.” And since *Princess* is a novel in which races interact, he describes slummers as “John Carter and Dejah Thoris types going on their very own personal martian adventures.”

When he tires of criticizing ERB and John Carter, Diaz takes on Tarzan a little bit, referring to Tarzan’s “lynchings” of blacks. Until I read Diaz’s introduction, I had never heard anyone refer to Tarzan as a “one-man lynch mob” and I think the characterization is inaccurate and unfair and Diaz probably darn well knows it. A lynch mob, like the kind people usually think of when they hear the term, is generally a crowd of people who execute someone (who may be innocent) without a fair trial. In the jungle, it is true that Tarzan sometimes lassoed a cannibal and yanked him off the ground at the end of the rope, but—in *context*—this was the law of the jungle at work, the only law available, and Tarzan was growing up as someone who never heard the laws of Diaz’s “whiteman” and was using this tactic, not out of prejudice, but because he was literally at war with the cannibals, who he recognized as unjustly torturing and killing helpless human captives, some of whom were also black.

But Diaz chooses to ignore all of that, because it wouldn’t go along with his general theme and also probably because it would have made his introduction 41 pages instead of 40. In reality, it would have made his 40-page introduction into a 39-pager since, if he was being honest about Tarzan as a “lyncher,” he would have understood what ERB was actually writing about Tarzan and would have left that part out!

Speaking of leaving things out, the thought at least crossed my mind that this edition of *A Princess of Mars* could be vastly improved if I were to take a ruler and an exacto knife and slice Diaz’s introduction from

my book. However, I am not one who destroys books, even if they contain such literary rubbish as Diaz trashing ERB. So, my LOA *Princess* can breathe easy.

I could go on and on quoting Diaz's outrageous statements, but this probably suffices to relate the general tone of his essay, which Diaz says took him several weeks to write. With that long to compose it, one might think that this creative writing teacher<sup>8</sup> could have found more creative ways to express himself than by using two of the worst of George Carlin's "seven dirty words" several times each. It's possible that the Library of America edition of *A Princess of Mars* may be the *only* ERB book in existence to include such words!

Usually, when we ERB book lovers choose to buy a new book to add to our library, we don't take the time to read the introduction in depth. So I thought I would do Edgardemain readers the service of letting you know what's in this *Princess* intro before you turn loose of your hard-earned book dollars to buy it, just in case Diaz's words are something you'd rather *not* have on your shelf.

In contrast, Thomas Mallon's introduction to *Tarzan of the Apes* is much shorter—12 pages—and much better. He too, incidentally, discusses the "lynching" topic in connection with Tarzan. However, he seems to take a more measured and less offensive approach than Diaz. Mallon must be one of those "whitemen" that Diaz talks about!

Throughout his introduction, Diaz references other authors of whom I have never heard, nor have I read their books from which he sometimes lifts

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<sup>8</sup> Díaz teaches creative writing at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology as the Rudge and Nancy Allen Professor of Writing

quotes. To do an adequate job of analyzing Diaz's introduction, I would need to get and read all of those authors and study their works as well, and that would take a lot of time that I don't have to simply "better understand" what Mr. Diaz is getting at. After all, he's the one who is the creative writer—if Junot Diaz wants his stuff to be easier to understand, he should write it plainer.

Diaz seems to be writing purely for academic peer approval. The average reader will get lost in this string of confusing and, at times, incoherent thoughts. At times I wasn't entirely sure what he was saying: Was a particular sentence a criticism? Or was he attempting to make an opposite point through irony?

I honestly believe that if Mr. Diaz was a student in his own creative writing class and handed in his *Princess* introduction as a term paper, he would probably get no better than a "C" on it—for lack of clarity if nothing else.

By the way, the Library of America website has been running a special on these two books—both of them for about \$30 total. Even if that price is no longer available by the time this review is published in ERBapa, the regular price—\$20 a volume—isn't really all that bad for a well-assembled hardbound ERB book with a dust jacket.

## New to this article:

Over on the other list,<sup>9</sup> I also posted my comments about Junot Diaz's introduction to *A Princess of Mars*. Afterward, Joan Bledig asked what I thought of Thomas Mallon's intro to the Library of America edi-

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<sup>9</sup> Jim Thompson's ERBCOF-L

tion of *Tarzan of the Apes*. Since I had only mentioned it briefly, earlier, I decided to go into a little more detail about it. Here's what I posted over there:

My forthcoming ERBapa contribution dwells mainly on Diaz's intro to PM. It was a bit draining to read, and then write about, Diaz's nasty introduction and I didn't have much energy left over for Mallon, so I handled him in no more than a paragraph or two of my ERBapa contribution. I'll expand on him a bit more in this post.

Compared to Diaz's rant, Mallon's introduction to *Apes* is as light is to darkness, as a friendly smile is to a know-it-all smirk. Like Diaz, Mallon is a creative writing teacher and has other credits which can be easily learned by googling him. Mallon's introduction is more the type of thing that I would expect in such an essay. I know that these introduction writers can't be as ga-ga as us fans over an ERB book. To maintain their academic credibility, they have to be a little bit critical of whatever they are introducing. Most of us understand that and are prepared to take a few hits, as long as the writer is fair to the main body of the work.

I'd say that Mallon is more than fair to ERB and *Apes*. His 12-page introduction has a title of its own: *The Language of Men*. He begins (and ends) by referring to the *New York Times* article of 1914 which listed *Apes* as one of 100 new books that everyone should read.

He then goes on to tell a little bit of ERB's history and circumstances of writing *Tarzan of the Apes* and noted that ERB

"was serving a brew of the wholesome and the exotic that appealed to the fantasy lives of both men and women, boys and

girls—precincts for the most part kept rigidly separated by writers of what we now call 'genre fiction'."

Throughout his introduction, Mallon compares ERB to other famous authors and his characters to equally famous literary characters, and generally in a favorable sense. He mentions that Tarzan forever has "a place in fiction's company of romantic renouncers," specifically naming Dickens' Sidney Carton and Bogart's Rick.

Mallon comments on several entertaining and interesting things in the story in *Apes*, and also refers several times to ERB's story-telling technique.

On the criticism side, Mallon acknowledges that there are "episodes to be squirmed through and gotten past," mentioning ERB's description of the "low and bestial appearance" of the blacks, the comedy stereotype of Esmeralda, and "three separate incidents, including Tarzan's roping and strangulation of D'Arnot's African assailant, (that) bear a close resemblance to lynching."

Diaz brought up the subject of lynching, too. Diaz seemed somewhat gleeful in talking about it, whereas Mallon mentions it somewhat reluctantly then moves on to relate that one of the blacks Tarzan dispatched, aided by a rope around the neck, had killed the ape-man's mother.<sup>10</sup>

Diaz, however, refers to Tarzan as a "one-man lynch mob." Diaz, we must remember, was actually re-viewing *A Princess of Mars*, so he had to divert into

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<sup>10</sup> Editor's Note: The Rope, Bow and Arrow, Knife, Hands, or Teeth, can be used as a weapon. Today's politically-sensitive conscious equates the rope to *hanging*, a form of society-sanctioned execution or racial intimidation without consideration that the Rope is merely an age-old tool which *can be used* as a weapon.

*Apes* in order to add this inciting subject to his indictment of ERB's "racial shenanigans."

Anyone reading Diaz, who is unfamiliar with what ERB actually says, could easily come away with the idea that Tarzan "lynches" blacks in the same way and with the same prejudice that illegal lynchings of black people took place in this country. Mallon, at least, explains the circumstances for some of these incidents, to give the reader of his introduction a better understanding.

In all my years as an ERB fan, I never thought of Tarzan's tactics as "lynchings" and never heard anyone describe them as such. It's possible that term has been used before but, if it has, I never heard it (or read it). I'm guessing that it is something that is brought up in some college lit classes, since both Diaz and Mallon found it necessary to use the term.

It's obvious to this reader that Diaz was drooling and licking his lips as he hacked away at his keyboard to expose Tarzan's "lynchings" to the world, whereas Mallon seems to be somewhat apologetic for even bringing the subject up. I don't think Mallon thought of ERB as a racist, but rather as one who simply wrote of these subjects in the same way as many well-known colleagues, including Booth Tarkington.

Overall, even with his brief mention of lynching, I find Mallon's introduction just fine, about what I would expect an introduction to be.

By the way, somewhere in his dozen pages, Mallon refers to what he characterizes as "the most thrilling sentence in the book." What would YOUR choice be for the most thrilling sentence in *Tarzan of the Apes*? Any nominees?

I won't reveal Mallon's choice (yet), but I've put a clue to it in the post above!

Edgardemain – An Erbmania Contributor  
<http://www.erblast.com>

## Bridge

*This version of the article has been edited, expanded and footnoted for inclusion to the Edgardemain contributor column at ERBList.com <http://www.erblast.com>*