



## John Henry: Roark Bradford's Novel and Play

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Roark Bradford's 1931 novel and 1939 play dealing with the legendary folk-hero John Henry (both titled *John Henry*) were extremely influential in their own time but have long been unavailable or extremely hard to find. In this unique collection, Steven C. Tracy has joined Bradford's seminal works in a new critical edition to help contextualize both the novel and play, making these vital texts widely available again for scholars of folklore and African American literature.

This new volume includes an expansive introduction that explores Bradford's life and work, critical responses to the novel and play, and a survey of John Henry's pervasive influence in folk, literary, and popular culture. It also features a wide array of supplementary materials, including a selected bibliography and discography related to Bradford and John Henry; transcriptions of a number of folksong texts and recordings available during the 1930s; and a chronology of the lives of both Bradford and Henry. As Tracy's introduction makes clear, such a consideration of Bradford--set in the context of writers, both black and white, drawing upon African American folklore and using dialects along with stereotypical and non-stereotypical portrayals--is long overdue.

In pairing Bradford's two treatments of the quintessentially American story of John Henry, Tracy has provided the definitive edition of two classic American texts, and in so doing, he provides a welcome opportunity to reflect on the various paths by which African American traditions have infiltrated the cultural mainstream.

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