

Introduction

George Wylie Henderson (1904–65) lived the transformations made possible by the Great Migration of blacks during the era of industrialization: born on a farm, he graduated from nearby Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute and found work as a linotype operator in New York City. He also gained fame as an author. Chiefly known for his critically acclaimed 1935 novel about an Alabama farmhand who acquires a “farm of her own,” *Ollie Miss*, and the 1946 sequel narrating her son’s migration to Harlem, *Jule*, Henderson also enjoyed a widespread popular audience for his periodical fiction.¹ This book collects the seventeen stories Henderson published as a regular contributor to the *New York Daily News* and *Redbook* magazine. They are stories that have been surprisingly difficult to find: no published list of the stories had ever been established until I began this work, and despite their large circulations, both periodicals are available in only a few research libraries, on microfilm.² These carefully crafted, simple tales of life in Alabama, Memphis, and New York City are well worth recovering, in part because they dramatize the profound ambivalence many blacks felt about their participation in the Great Migration. Henderson’s stories of the rural South are sometimes nostalgic, but they never flinch from presenting the hard work and violence of everyday southern life. Similarly, those stories set in Harlem depict the glamour of city life, yet they also worry about urban poverty and social mores. Henderson wrote the stories during the same period in which he was writing his novels, and he often draws from the same set of characters to create these various fictional settings; the stories, then, enhance our view of the world of the novels. Moreover, because of his prolific output during this period and his access to a general audience, Henderson’s stature needs to be reevaluated. Though literary historians have characterized Henderson as a minor novelist of the period, we might instead describe him as one of the chief popular voices of the black migrant.

Henderson was born on June 14, 1904, in Warrior Stand, Alabama, a small hamlet in Macon County. This area was part of Alabama's Black Belt, where many black farmers and sharecroppers grew cotton and corn in the shadows of decaying plantation houses; Henderson would later say that he started life planting cotton.³ He was in the third generation born in the vicinity of Warrior Stand. His paternal grandparents, Alex Henderson (b. 1854) and Caroline Moore Henderson (b. 1859), were married on Bird Weathers' Plantation in December 1874.⁴ They were sharecroppers for many years, though the 1900 census shows them living with their daughters in Montgomery, Alabama, where Alex worked as a woodcutter and Caroline worked as a laundress; meanwhile, their two sons worked the farm at Warrior Stand.⁵ Henderson's father, George Wylie Henderson Sr., was born circa 1879. In 1901, he married Ella May Gresham (b. 1883), also a native of Warrior Stand and the oldest daughter of denizens John and Martha Gresham; they would eventually have eleven children together.⁶ The senior George Henderson graduated in 1899 from nearby Tuskegee and attended seminary in New Orleans shortly thereafter.⁷

Though George Wylie Henderson Jr. was born in Warrior Stand, his early years were spent in the nearby town of Wetumpka, where his father worked as a preacher and the family lived in a rented house, according to the 1910 census.⁸ This same census shows Alex and Caroline farming land they now owned in Warrior Stand.⁹ But the family moved in 1915 to Tuskegee, where George Sr. became pastor of the Butler Chapel AME Zion Church. This was a position of some prestige, as the site of the chapel is also where Booker T. Washington founded Tuskegee and held its first classes. All indications are that Henderson's parents remained in Tuskegee for the remainder of their lives.¹⁰

George Wylie Henderson Jr. would follow in his father's footsteps and matriculate at Tuskegee in 1918.¹¹ As befits the Hampton-Tuskegee model, Henderson's curriculum provided a broad-based academic education (similar to our current secondary curriculum) with practical emphases: mathematics courses, for instance, covered measurement techniques for carpentry, while a geography course focused on agricultural production.¹² Also emphasized was oratory, and this was an area in which Henderson excelled. He twice placed second in Tuskegee's annual speech contest and was chosen as class orator in his senior year. One of the topics for which he won a prize was "Booker T. Washington,

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the Apostle of Industrial Education.”¹³ Washington had founded Tuskegee in 1881 and had risen to national prominence for his accommodationist stance toward segregation and his advocacy of industrial training for black Americans. The Hendersons arrived in Tuskegee in 1915, the year of Washington’s death, but his philosophy held sway over the institute in the following years, and the famous statue of Washington lifting the “veil of ignorance” from his people was installed on the campus shortly before Henderson’s graduation in 1922. Washington’s politics and self-fashioning inspired much controversy, notably in his exchange with W. E. B. DuBois, who advocated the notion that a “talented tenth” of the African American community should form an intellectual vanguard to advance the race; Washington’s emphasis on industrial training, DuBois feared, would simply perpetuate the subordinate status of blacks in the industrial era. When Henderson emerged from Tuskegee some twenty years after the debate, his stated ambition in the senior yearbook was “to be a lawyer.”¹⁴ Yet he had also received practical training in the printing trade at Tuskegee, and this, more than his oratorical skills, served him as he made his way toward Harlem. Henderson’s career would form a synthesis between the models of DuBois and Washington: as a novelist, he was part of the intellectual vanguard DuBois imagined, yet as a printer, he worked consistently throughout the Depression era.

Henderson married a Tuskegee graduate, Lettie Horn, of Lake Charles, Louisiana, and they had a son in 1926.¹⁵ He began writing fiction shortly thereafter. It is not clear when the couple made the move to New York City, but by 1931 they were settled in the Dunbar Apartments in Harlem, enjoying friendships with such intellectuals as Langston Hughes and Zell Ingram.¹⁶ Henderson was working as a linotype operator at the plant for the *Daily News* and was proud of his membership in Big Six, the typographers’ union.¹⁷ By 1932, he and his family had moved to the Bronx. His location in the community would provoke attention from the black press when he emerged as a writer: the *New York Amsterdam News*, Harlem’s newspaper, ran an article on him in 1932 entitled “Young Bronx Printer Strides toward Fame.”¹⁸

Henderson’s first story, “Sinner Man’s Wedding,” was printed in the *Daily News* in January 1932 as part of the paper’s “Daily Story from Real Life” feature; it was the first of nine Henderson would publish in this setting during 1932 and 1933. “Sinner Man’s Wedding” was reportedly bought several years before it first

"Man in de Moon"

By
GEORGE HENDERSON

who wrote steadily for five years before he found his first market for stories on this page. Is a native of Alabama and an alumnus of Tuskegey, from which his father also graduated. He is a printer by trade and member of "Big Six," the Typographical Union. His greatest ambition is to make good as a writer.



The Daily Story
from
Real Life



THEY christened him John Henry, but they called him "Sonny Boy." They said that he was born when the moon was lying flat on its back, and that he had strange sights in his eyes. His mother died the day he was born and his father went to the chain-gang before he was 2. So his Grandma Sooky had reared him. He cut his teeth on a Jew's-harp and learned his alphabets from the Bible, and, at 12, he had read its sixty-six books seven times through.

As a child, it was told that he used to wander up and down Swamp Creek behind a man on a milk-white steed that nobody could see but himself; and that, at night, he'd sit on the pigsty when the moon was full, and watch the man in the moon wrestle with himself. People said that he was moon-struck. But his Grandma Sooky told him that he was allowing the devil to mislead him and to work his spell of wickedness over him. "Dat man in de moon," Grandma Sooky had said, "an' 'er'nin' but de devil none. De Lawd put dat devil up dere so de whole world could see jes' what a big fool de devil is—astin' up dere rasslin' wid' hisself." An' instead of 'you sayin' yo' prayers de same as evabody else is doin', you is gwine 'round heah lookin' up at de moon an' idolizin' de devil. Dat moon ain't 'nuthin' but a sin shinin' moonshine in yo' eyes an' 'er'nin' wickedness into yo' soul."

SONNY BOY LIKES THE MOON.

Sonny Boy had looked at his Grandma Sooky rather queerly when she said that. He wasn't a talkative boy, and usually the words got tied up in his throat. But he managed to say: "Dat man in de moon ain't no devil, Grandma. He's jes' er' natural man, de same as I is. De devil—he's in hell."

"An' where," countered Grandma Sooky, "do you s'pose hell is heahen, 'cause dat's where de Lawd is. He'll is down heah on earth up dere in de moon, an' down in hell, too. Ain't de Bible done set dat, on de last day, de moon, er'nin' waste way in blood!"

Sonny Boy hadn't said anything to that. He didn't know what to say. Besides, Sonny Boy liked the moon. He liked the queer, lonesome way the moon made him feel. And so, at 15, he became restless and took to the open road.

His only equipment was a guitar strapped across his shoulder and a song on his lips, and his feet, loggishly enough, had a strange rhythm of their own. When he danced, people laughed to keep from crying, for, when he sang, they had to cry, trying to keep from laughing. But, then, laughing

The Cast of Characters in "Man in de Moon."

SONNY BOY, a restless colored youth who prefers to sing and play a guitar rather than work.

CLARA, the girl to whom he occasionally sang and played.

was crying, only you used giggles instead of tears.

For the most part, old Jason was passively indifferent toward these proceedings; but there came a time when, in the thick of things, old Jason found it necessary to tell Sonny Boy that he wasn't so powerfully pleased to have a moon-struck, guitar-pickin' fool hanging around his doorstep.

"Fact o' de matter is," old Jason had said, "you bettin' get yo'eif a hoe and plow an' git to work. Walkin' 'round heah moonin' lak

change of seasons by his coming. He traveled on foot through the dewy coolness of night and made his bed among alders and pine needles in the heat of day, along the marshy banks of Swamp Creek. Farmers gave him meat and drink to hear him strum and sing "Midnight on de Mississippi," and they'd give him wine and whiskey, too, just to see him dance. Sonny Boy roamed, but always in Spring and late Summer he came back to Black Bottom. Black Bottom was home, and he liked to see the way sprouting cotton weeds cracked the earth's crust just outside of Grandma Sooky's kitchen window, or to watch the liquid glitter of corn bottom, lush and green, in the pale glare of a yellow moon.

Sonny Boy didn't know why he always went to old Jason's home. He knew, of course, that Clara lived there. Clara was old Jason's daughter. But as to whether he went there to see Clara, Sonny Boy

wasn't sure. He couldn't be sure. He had never said a word to Clara and she had never said anything to him. She merely sat there in the doorway, with her leg-jack-knifed underneath her, and listened, the whites of her eyes dilated into half moons, while Sonny Boy strummed the strings of his guitar and watched the weird shadows the moon made beneath the trees. And, in the end, he'd take his departure so silently as he had come—without a word!

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Clara not to marry him, so instead of asking her what he had intended to do simply said, "I jes' fill be goin' away some. Somethin' inside o' me is sorter rasselin' wid' me."

Clara looked at him and knew it was the spell of the moon shining down on them and nodded, saying, "I'll be heah waitin' fer yo' when yo' comes back."

So Sonny Boy went away, and for several months he didn't return to Black Bottom at all. He worked his way across the Alabama line into the lower lands bordering the Mississippi. And early one evening, toward late Summer, he found himself on a wharf in a small river town watching a boat steam into port, as though it were a great bird coming home to roost.

SONNY BOY WANTS 'O GO HOME.

Sonny Boy had never seen a real steamboat before, and he had never seen so much water at one time, either. So, when the boat docked and the Captain came ashore, looking for an extra dishwasher to add to his crew, Sonny Boy took the job and was whisked away toward the bosom of what, to him, was a vast sea of water.

But when the boat reached Memphis, Sonny Boy had stood on the upper deck, after the man-



Old Jason made an effort to get to his feet, then dropped in a dead faint.

you might, be a triffin' hant er somethin'!"

Clara seemed to be the only one who understood Sonny Boy, so one night when he came to see her he had intended asking her to marry him. He already knew she married Love doesn't need words to express its feelings. He knew she'd marry him right, but then as he got to strumming his guitar he also got to thinking of her, so old Jason, and all he had said to Sonny Boy. So he got to figuring after all maybe he was moonstruck and maybe it would be best for

lengers had gone ashore, looking at the moon and of hard like, his eyes dark and deeply troubled. Then he told the Captain that he was going home.

"Cap'n," Sonny Boy said, "I wants to go home."

"You can't get your pay unless you finish the trip," the Captain said. The Captain wanted Sonny Boy to stay. But Sonny Boy said, "Cap'n, I don't wants no pay—I jes' wants to go home!"

Home was Black Bottom, and it was Black Bottom that Sonny Boy went. The Captain gave

Sonny Boy his pay and ten dollars besides, and ten days later, Sonny Boy, with his stickery log that spanned Swamp Creek, reading into Black Bottom.

It was early evening. Black Bottom was blanketed in gloom. Log cabins were dark and ominous; still, and nowhere was there a sound to be heard. Not even a dog barked and the trees and the dark green shrubbery were as motionless as sentinels at a martyr's tomb. And this, for Black Bottom, was strange indeed; for Black Bottom, when the sun goes down, is pregnant with life—with the pulsing throbs of life. Just to Sonny Boy it wasn't strange at all!

Hadn't he looked at that moon back yonder in Memphis? And hadn't that moon told him, " . . . The moon was full then, its face bathed in blood; and that man in the moon had stopped wrestlin' with himself. Only now, it wasn't a man at all; Sonny Boy could see it as plain as day. It was—she was—a woman, and the woman was dyin'! Just who the man was Sonny Boy couldn't make out. The moon was too far and its face was too red, and the floor of the moon was making a crimson halo about the woman's face."

Grandma Sooky's shack was dark. Mister's shack was dark; and old Jason's shack was dark, too. Only in old Jason's shack was there a light to be seen. Sonny Boy stopped dead in his tracks, and something cold and fierce gripped his throat. His body went suddenly cold with sweat. Then, he hurried on, for he knew now that the woman was Clara. Something—something even worse than death—had happened to Clara. Sonny Boy could feel it.

Sonny Boy walked into old Jason's shack, old Jason made an effort to get to his feet, then dropped into a dead faint. The others, sitting there about the bed with the abny look of death on their faces, glared at Sonny Boy as though he might be something they had never seen before. Nobody spoke a word to Sonny Boy—not even Grandma Sooky. But Clara said from the cot where she lay: "It's all right now, Sonny Boy. It's all right—you done come home! I'm going now, but his all right. Her voice was like a whispering echo in judgment. Clara closed her eyes and, standing there, Sonny Boy saw something with life in it stir in the bed behind Clara.

Grandma Sooky took the child and reared it, and old Jason chopped Sonny Boy's guitar into firewood. So, Sonny Boy got himself a hoe and a plow and went to work. He had a child to feed. And every evening, when Sonny Boy came home, Grandma Sooky would have the child upon her knee, teaching him his alphabets from the Bible. But Grandma Sooky wouldn't let the child go to the window and look out at the moon.

"Dat moon," Grandma Sooky would begin, and break off, her eyes growing dim and a little misty-looking in her sockets.

"THE END."

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Tomorrow, "AT TOP SPEED," by Martin Stevens.

"Man in de Moon," the eighth story by George Wylie Henderson to appear in the "Daily Story from Real Life" series. All of the stories in this feature were illustrated and appeared beneath the comic strip "Gasoline Alley." *New York Daily News*, September 15, 1932, 31.

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appeared; it is likely that some of Henderson's stories were stock-piled, with the idea that multiple publications in a short time would help him to build a readership.¹⁹ The stories published in the "Daily Story" feature appeared beneath the comic strip "Gasoline Alley" and covered the remainder of the page. They were always accompanied by captioned illustrations of key scenes or characters (see, e.g., fig. 1). Henderson's portrait was featured along with a brief biography; his identity as an African American was clearly visible to readers. A box listing the "cast of characters" and provocative section headings helped interest readers in the stories. At the time, the *Daily News* boasted the largest newspaper circulation in America, with 1.36 million daily readers and 1.77 million on Sundays.²⁰ Self-proclaimed as "New York's Picture Newspaper," this early tabloid was accessible to readers with limited literacy skills. While exact demographic figures are not available for its readership, the prevalence of advertisements for women's clothing, radios, furniture, and department stores and the paper's regular "beautiful child contest" suggest an audience of young married couples and young single working women. The default race for models in the paper's advertisements was white; it is difficult to gauge how many African American readers would have been attracted to the *Daily News*. As a contributor of fiction, Henderson joined writers from around the country who offered readers accessible, slightly melodramatic stories. The "Daily Story from Real Life" was often sensational, like the real news presented in the newspaper.

Of Henderson's nine stories published in the *Daily News*, seven are set in the rural South; the other two take place in New York City. The plots are sensational, with the majority featuring death or murder; the deathbed surprise was one of Henderson's favorite conceits. Some stories, like "Dance of Death" and "A Brownskin's Revenge," portray a violent episode and then explore the motivations that led up to the spectacle. The characters in these stories are often poor but hardworking, as we see in "Whistlin' Slim" and "Without Tears," among others; Washington's influence is felt here. Place names are drawn from the area around Tuskegee where Henderson was born, and minor characters like Ol' Head and Liza appear in story after story. Indeed, Henderson created a fictive community based in the rural South from which he drew his stories. He had a habit, however, of revising key elements of a previous fiction's characters and plotting in order to create a new work.

The story “‘Thy Name Is Woman,’” for example, is clearly a prototype for his first novel, *Ollie Miss*. In the story, a generically designated “Daughter” arrives on the farm of Alex and Caroline (characters no doubt based on Henderson’s paternal grandparents) and begs to exchange work for food. She is eyed with suspicion by Nan and Mae Jane, who ferret out the secrets of her past. A month after this story’s publication, Henderson announced in a biographical note that he was at work on a novel. He would lift much of the opening scene of *Ollie Miss* from “‘Thy Name Is Woman,’” though he gave Daughter the name of his title character and changed the secrets of her past; the other characters remain essentially the same.

As I have noted, *Ollie Miss* (1935) was a critical success. It was widely and favorably reviewed in the United States and England; most critics appreciated Henderson’s sensitive use of dialect, his suggestive descriptions of the Alabama countryside, and his compelling characterization of the heroine. When Ollie Miss wanders onto Alex and Caroline’s farm looking for work, she is something of a mystery; the members of the community are suspicious of her origins. The women gossip, while the men find her an object of sexual fascination. Her talent for farmwork is prodigious: she can plow row for row with the strongest men on the farm. She is given shelter in a cabin on the farm and settles for a bit. But her deepest emotional attachment, we learn, is to her former lover, Jule, who lives across the swamp. This attachment nearly proves to be fatal, however: she is seriously wounded in a fight with another woman over the rights to his affection. Recovering from this wound, she discovers she is pregnant with Jule’s child. Yet she ultimately determines to reject Jule’s support and to raise the child on her own. Alex gives her a plot of land, and she is proud to have a “farm of her own” that will allow her to provide for her child by the labor of her own hands. *Ollie Miss*, then, is a female bildungsroman in which the heroine achieves independence and learns Booker T. Washington’s maxim that one should “love work for its own sake.”²¹ It is a novel that imagines rural Alabama as offering a complete and satisfying way of life for its characters.

Shortly before the publication of *Ollie Miss*, Henderson changed his venue for short fiction and started publishing in *Redbook* magazine. The change of venue provoked some changes in his fiction. *Redbook*’s format afforded more flexibility as to length, since stories continued in the magazine’s back pages; the *Daily News*

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always adhered to a one-page story format. Some of Henderson's *Redbook* stories ran twice as long as the average *Daily News* story. Another change concerned setting: whereas the *Daily News* stories are mostly set in the rural South, all but one of the *Redbook* stories take place in New York City. Many concern the ambivalent feelings of recent black migrants from the South. In "Harlem Calling," for example, the heroine is attracted to the glamour of the Sugar Hill neighborhood in Harlem but ultimately opts to surround herself with migrants who maintain down-home values. In these stories, the virtues of moral respectability are linked to the rural past and are opposed to the temptations of urban life. Yet the rural South is not seriously contemplated as a destination: in "Time for a Dance," for example, the hero tries to recover his roots by taking a bus from New York to Memphis, but he finds that everything has changed and resolves to return to the city with the girl with whom he has danced. The stories from *Redbook* do not revisit the deathbed scenes so prevalent in the *Daily News* stories; they are typically less sensational. One common plot structure, however, involves a hero or heroine separated from a lover by the Depression or the war; these stories are sometimes resolved when the two are surprisingly reunited against all odds. Like the *Daily News* stories, these stories draw from a fictive community of characters. Some of these derive from the rural scenes Henderson sketched in earlier fictions, while others, like Jake Simmons and Link and Obelia Johnson, were created for the urban scene. The changes in Henderson's writing may have been provoked by the different readership he was addressing: *Redbook* was a more prestigious venue for a fiction writer, with more "literary" values than the *Daily News*. Its readers were likely to be more affluent and urbane. The magazine's target audience was female, and Henderson seems to have engaged this audience with romantic plots. Although *Redbook* did not run biographical notes, Henderson's identity was occasionally implied: "Harlem Calling," for instance, was promoted as "that rarest thing of all—a genuine Sugar Hill story written by one who still lives there."²²

In general, the changes to Henderson's fiction during the *Redbook* era also pertain to his second novel, published in 1946. Whereas *Ollie Miss* and most of the *Daily News* stories are set in the rural South, *Jule* moves its hero from Alabama to New York. *Jule* is the story of Ollie Miss's son. It begins on the farm in Alabama where Ollie Miss raised him. In a flashback, however,

Henderson revises the closing scene of *Ollie Miss*: in place of her refusal of the father's affections, Henderson has her pathetically pleading him to stay. To compensate for the father's absence, Ollie Miss names her son after him; where the first novel depicts her achieving independence on the farm, the second shows her desperately determined to raise her son in his father's image. The son soon discovers that he cannot realize his mother's desire for him "to be somebody" in Alabama: he is chased out of the South by a white man who lays claim to his girlfriend.²³ The setting, as in the *Redbook* stories, shifts to Harlem, where Jule meets Jake Simmons and other characters from these stories. He ultimately achieves success, like Henderson, when he becomes an apprentice printer; Booker T. Washington would have been pleased. His success comes, Henderson insists, despite the disabling attentions of urban women, who cheat on him. When Jule returns to Alabama to attend his mother's funeral, he discovers a land that is desiccated and cannot sustain daily life. He rescues his girlfriend, who has escaped from the clutches of the white man yet retained her country values, and they return to the city to enjoy the fruits of Jule's success. The second novel, then, revises major elements of the first novel: the heroine of *Ollie Miss* does not achieve emotional independence, and the economic and geographical context in which she raises her son does not promise to sustain further success. The city, despite its moral dangers, is the locus of future successes for black Americans, Henderson argues.

Jule was also widely reviewed, but not so favorably as *Ollie Miss*. One critic complained that it was written in "primer style"; indeed, the dialogue is often tautological, simplistic, and slowly paced, and descriptive passages often consist of a long series of declarative sentences.²⁴ Henderson published only one additional story after *Jule* appeared: "Only Mary and Me," the sole fiction by Henderson to feature an exclusively white cast, appeared in *Redbook* in 1947. Some commentators have suggested that the negative reviews of *Jule* led Henderson to give up on his writing.²⁵ It is unclear whether those reviews made it difficult for Henderson to publish again, but there is evidence to suggest that he continued to write in the years following *Jule*. The author's papers include a catalog of writings that lists fifteen additional stories, all unpublished, undated, and lost. His stepdaughter, Roslyn Kirkland Allen, explains that some years ago a burglar broke into the family's townhouse in Harlem and stole the copper pipes in the base-

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ment to sell for scrap; many of the author's papers were destroyed in the subsequent flood. Allen was fourteen when *Jule* appeared, but she remembers Henderson as an active writer during her childhood. In addition, she remembers that whenever they needed money for her college tuition he would write a story and send it to *Redbook*; five hundred dollars would appear shortly thereafter.²⁶ On this evidence, it seems possible that Henderson had a contractual agreement with *Redbook* that continued even though the magazine did not publish his new work; indeed, an exclusivity clause may have prevented him from seeking other venues for his short fiction. My queries to *Redbook* on these matters have gone unanswered. At the very least, however, we have reason to doubt that Henderson was tragically silenced by bad reviews, as some have suggested.

One of Henderson's unpublished works did escape the flood. Late in life, Henderson was at work on a third novel, *Baby Lou and the Angel Bud*, that would join *Ollie Miss* and *Jule* in a trilogy concerning his Alabama "folk." The action of *Baby Lou* precedes *Ollie Miss* in time. Set in Alabama and featuring the male children of Caroline and Alex, Lou and Bud, the manuscript includes an eighty-nine-year old character, Damma, who is a former slave. This recognition of the slave past is accompanied by scenes of racial violence—the Ku Klux Klan makes an appearance, for example. In general, this novel draws broader contours of collective life among black characters, and includes more scenes of black and white interaction, than do Henderson's previous novels. The surviving typescript reveals an incomplete and unfocused narrative. Perhaps Henderson, who obviously felt great comfort working within the formal expectations of the bildungsroman, could not complete a work with a dual focus on two brothers and great attention to collective life.²⁷

In his 1958 study, *The Negro Novel in America*, Robert Bone paired Henderson with Zora Neale Hurston in a section entitled "Aspects of the Racial Past."²⁸ While Hurston has deservedly received extensive critical attention in the intervening years, Henderson has been discussed in only three academic articles. Hurston's output was more substantial, and her neglect was more extreme: there is no need for critics to mark Henderson's grave, as Alice Walker did for Hurston in 1973. But why has Henderson continued to languish as a "minor novelist" despite his critical and popular successes? In part, writers and critics coming out of the

black aesthetic and feminist movements of the 1960s and 1970s were looking for other things: Richard Wright's radicalism, for example, and Hurston's implication in gender issues caught the attention of these readers. Henderson's individualist ethos and his debt to Booker T. Washington would not have been so attractive in this context. Also, historians of the Harlem Renaissance would not have found Henderson particularly well connected: he came to the scene late, and he was setting type when other writers were networking in intellectual circles. Although he was written up by the black press and reviewed in its pages and in the pages of intellectual magazines, his publishers were mainstream commercial presses and mass media publications. His two periodical venues, despite their wide availability at the time, are not indexed; he became invisible in the scholarly record. But as I have tried to suggest, his situation as a migrant from Alabama with a Tuskegee education, a working-class life, and a popular audience for his fiction makes him a unique and revealing figure. I am drawn to his work by the way in which he tries to think about this situation through fictional form. His restless revisions of sensational fiction, romantic fiction, and the bildungsroman show him grappling with, if never fully resolving, the contradictions of trying to tell stories about black American lives in these popular genres. With the "discovery" of these lost stories from the periodical market, the scholarly community has an opportunity to reassess Henderson's marginal status in African American literary history. Historians of the literary response to the Great Migration will find his work to be indispensable. And readers in general will continue to find interest in these well-crafted, simple, and engaging stories from a transformative moment in American life.

—David G. Nicholls

NOTES

1. George Wylie Henderson, *Ollie Miss* (1935; rpt., Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1988), 276.

2. In 1997, I published the first list of Henderson's stories. See David G. Nicholls, "George Wylie Henderson: A Primary and Secondary Bibliography," *Bulletin of Bibliography* 54, no. 4 (1997): 335–38.

3. George Wylie Henderson, "'Thy Name Is Woman,'" *New York Daily News*, July 15, 1932, 29.

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4. Macon County, Alabama, *Marriage Records of Macon County, 1872–1876* (Macon County, Ala., n.d.), 642; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Tenth Census of the United States, 1880, Alabama: Macon*, 14, enumeration district 117 (Washington, D.C., 1880), sheet 10, line 16.

5. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Alabama: Montgomery*, 46, enumeration district 98 (Washington, D.C., 1900): sheet 11, line 72; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900, Alabama: Macon*, 38, enumeration district 111 (Washington, D.C., 1900), sheet 18, line 29.

6. This information on Ella Gresham Henderson is found in the program from her funeral, archived at the Tuskegee University Library. See Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, “Funeral Services for Mrs. Ella Gresham Henderson” (Tuskegee, Ala.: Butler Chapel AME Zion Church, May 23, 1959), 3.

7. *Tuskegee Student*, May 13, 1916, 5. A 1903 letter by George Wylie Henderson Sr. establishes his association with the Department of Theology at Straight University, New Orleans. Archived at Howard University, it is partially reprinted in a biographical essay about his son (and the letter is wrongly attributed to the son, who had not yet been born when it was drafted): see Emmanuel S. Nelson’s entry in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, vol. 51, “George Wylie Henderson.”

8. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Population, Alabama: Elmore County*, 37, enumeration district 89 (Washington, D.C., 1910), sheet 4, line 6.

9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Population Schedules of the Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Population, Alabama: Macon District*, 128 (Washington, D.C., 1910), sheet 16B. With the assistance of county authorities, I was able to locate the Hendersons’ farm on a visit during June 2000. The main house had recently burned, but a cornerstone indicated that the house had first been constructed in 1900 by A. H. Henderson and was rebuilt in 1953 by Reverend T. A. Henderson, who was the brother of George Wylie Henderson Jr. A faded sign announcing the Henderson Place hung at the entrance to the driveway.

10. See Butler Chapel AME Zion Church. According to his tombstone at the Ashdale Cemetery in Tuskegee, George Wylie Henderson Sr. died on November 2, 1960, about a year and a half after the death of his wife.

11. *Thirty-eighth Annual Catalog* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1918–19), 156.

12. *Thirty-eighth Annual Catalog*, 62–65.

13. *Fortieth Annual Catalog* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1920–21), 149; *Tuskegee Student*, August 13,

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1921, 1; *Forty-first Annual Catalog* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1921–22), 147; *Tuskegee Student*, May 27–June 10, 1922, 1–2.

14. *Carver* (Tuskegee, Ala.: Senior Class, Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, 1922).

15. *Thirty-eighth Annual Catalog*, 156; Edythe Robertson, “Young Bronx Printer Strides toward Fame,” *New York Amsterdam News*, August 31, 1932, 2.

16. Blyden Jackson, “Introduction,” in Henderson, *Ollie Miss*, xi.

17. George Wylie Henderson, “‘Man in de Moon,’” *New York Daily News*, September 15, 1932, 31.

18. See Robertson, “Young Bronx Printer.”

19. Robertson, “Young Bronx Printer.”

20. *New York Daily News*, January 1, 1932, 1.

21. Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (1901), in *Three Negro Classics*, ed. John Hope Franklin (New York: Avon Books, 1965), 108.

22. George Wylie Henderson, “Harlem Calling,” *Redbook*, April 1934, 42.

23. George Wylie Henderson, *Jule* (1946; rpt., Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1989), 232.

24. Hubert Creekmore, “The Evolution of Jule,” *New York Times*, October 13, 1946, 22.

25. See Nelson, “George Wylie Henderson.”

26. Roslyn Kirkland Allen, telephone conversation with the author, February 19, 1997.

27. The typescript survives in the collection of Roslyn Kirkland Allen.

28. Robert Bone, *The Negro Novel in America*, rev. ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1965), 123–26.