
Katie Lyn Peebles
Indiana University, Bloomington

Nancy Mason Bradbury proposes a continuum of orality in the range of the Middle English romances she chooses to present. However, all five examples—*The Tale of Gamelyn*, *Havelok the Dane*, *The Siege of Troye*, *Kyng Alisaunder*, and *Troilus and Criseyde*—might be better described as consciously and stylistically “more oral” or “more literate.” Bradbury’s study is concerned with looking at a body of literature, part of a larger social culture, located at the crossroads of oral and written communication and meaning. Even what Bradbury describes as the most elaborately literate text, Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde*, still draws on techniques and contextual references meaningful to an oral culture. The chronological order of composition is not significant, and Bradbury cautions that the project “should not be mistaken for an attempt at a chronological history of the evolution of Middle English romance out of performed minstrelsy and into manuscript culture” (6). The romances presented here are interesting not as evidence of oral storytelling practices but as indications of how signs of orality in literary texts remained useful.

*Gamelyn* is the story of a dispossessed youth that shares many formulaic similarities with English and Scottish outlaw ballads. Francis James Child used it as a standard of comparison for #128, *Robin Hood Newly Revived* (57). Bradbury uses ballad scholarship and the storytelling research of Karl Kroeber to analyze the repetitions, traditional sayings, and stock situations that are not always appreciated by literary critics. *Havelok the Dane* is a fairly standard literary text, but it includes renarration: telling part of the story again from another character’s point of view. This process introduces contradictions in the narrative, but it also emphasizes the cumulative effect for understanding action and characterization that is more typical of traditional repetition.

*The Siege of Troye* exists in four distinct manuscript versions, which suggests the significance of oral memory in the text’s transmission
In a statement that could apply to much of Middle English romance, Bradbury calls for a multilayered reading of the text "that takes into account the many possibilities for its transmission and consumption: recital from memory, reading aloud, private reading" (114). In contrast, *Kyng Alisaundor* does not support memorial transmission and consciously interweaves literary techniques with more traditional headpieces. Bradbury interprets this layering of approaches as reflecting the ambiguous interplay of Eastern setting and Western text, as well as different traditions of Alexander himself. I found Bradbury's discussion of Chaucer's use of traditional referentiality—another layering technique—in *Troilus and Criseyde* particularly interesting. She works from John Miles Foley's theory of oral formulas existing intertextually to build up a network of traditional allusions and resonances that *Troilus and Criseyde* shares with other romances.

*Writing Aloud* brings together interesting literary and folkloristic theories about narrative, genre, and audience in provocative combinations with Middle English texts. Each chapter addresses a distinct theoretical concern, but, in consonance with one of the signs of orality it discusses, the book builds up connections between sections so that the cumulative effect of each gradually becomes clearer.


Gregory Hansen
Arkansas State University

Uncle Monday is a shape-shifter who protects the land and waters near Blue Sink Lake in central Florida. Zora Neale Hurston first documented stories about Uncle Monday during the 1920s. In her writings, she traces Uncle Monday's roots to western Africa, where he first entered folklore as a famous medicine man. Captured and sold into slavery, Uncle Monday escaped from South Carolina into Florida and swore he would transform himself into an alligator rather