Abstract

Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield* is a novel which consists of printed words formed in literate culture. Monthly serial release, the publishing format of this work, however, creates an inherent lack of continuity. When readers read one part of the serial, they may not have read the contents of the previous parts. This resembles sound; they disappear as they are heard. Publishing format is an element of the media which controls practicalities of work in the real world. This is why the composition of *David Copperfield* reflects oral culture. Elements of this culture are listed by W. J. Ong in *Orality and Literacy*: redundancy, monumental characters and bizzare characters. Repeating the same information and including impressive characters are necessary for orally told stories to be kept in the memory after the sound, rendered unrepeatable by the context of the event, disappears. Regarding *David Copperfield* as an oral culture work, this paper does not insist that it is because the author and the readers belonged to an oral culture nor because the work was often read out. According to Ong, oral or aural media which is based on written or printed words is "secondary orality". When this study suggests that *David Copperfield*, a serialized novel belongs to an oral culture, the focus is on this "secondary orality".

While the publication form, and the composition and the characters demanded by the form have features of orality, David, the protagonist in the story is described as a literate person, and, as suggested by Marshall McLuhan in *Understanding Media*, he understands letters and writing from a very modern perspective. David, for example, divides the time and space. This is a special sense peculiar to literate people since this sense is formed by stabilizing the sound in space using letters.

Besides, as McLuhan and Ong point out, writing separates the writer and written words, and writers are never emotionally involved in what they are writing while speech requires immediate response from both the speaker and the audience. David, as he narrate the story, tries to externalize his painful past and to separate it from him. What is more, David is a character who registers fundamental ties to literacy communication. This leads the work to have elements of literary culture.

This mixture of orality and literacy seen in *David Copperfield* reflects the environment of nineteenth-century Britain, an age of media revolution, in which new media were formed though most people did not realize it. The electric telegraph was a light speed literary media element, but at the same time, it forms an intelligence network. Tom Standage shows in *The Victorian Internet* that this network was understood as being something like spider's web in the nineteenth century. It is true that information at one point in this network instantly reaches anywhere within it, just as is the case with a spider's web. The electric telegraph system makes a community even if the scale is physically limited. As McLuhan and Ong insist, sound and oral speech make communities. Reading letters, on the other hand, is a closed and personal act. The electric telegraph thus changed the environment in the real world into a fusion of orality and literacy. However, it was recognized not as a form of informative media but as a form of psychic medium by many people at the time. It was difficult to understand that a message could reach to a distant place while the letter still remained in the possession of the writer. McLuhan claims that people can never perceive the environment they live in and that only art makes it visible. He calls such art "anti-environment" art. *David*

Copperfield, being a mixture of orality and literacy is an example of the "anti-environment" art, and it is this very media that communicates not only messages within the story, but also meta-messages which reflect reality.