PRINT AND CLOSURE: INTERTEXTUALITY

Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion. This sense affects literary creations and it affects analytic philosophical or scientific work.

Before print, writing itself encouraged some sense of noetic closure.By isolating thought on a written surface, detached from any interlocutor, making utterance in this sense autonomous and indifferent to attack, writing presents utterance and thought as uninvolved with all else, somehow self-contained, complete. Print in the same way situates utterance and thought on a surface disengaged from everything else, but it also goes farther in suggesting self-containment. Print encloses thought in thousands of copies of a work of exactly the same visual and physical consistency. Verbal correspondence of copies of the same printing can be checked with no resort to sound at all but simply by sight: a Hinman collator superimposed corresponding pages of two copies of a text and signal variations to the viewer with a blinking light.

The printed text is supposed to represent the words of an author in definitive or 'final' form. For print is comfortable only with finality. Once a letterpress forme is closed, locked up, or a

photolithographic plate is made, and the sheet printed, the text does not accommodate changes (erasures, insertions) so readily as do written texts. By contrast, manuscripts, with their glosses or marginal comments (which often got worked into the text in subsequent copies) were in dialogue with the world outside their own borders. They remained closer to the give-and-take of oral expression. The readers of manuscripts are less closed off from the author, less absent, than are the readers of those writing for print. The sense of closure or completeness enforced by print is at times grossly physical. A newspaper's pages are normally all filled—certain kinds of printed material are called 'fillers'—just as its lines of type are normally all justified (i.e. all exactly the same width). Print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness. It can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete or self-consistent.

Print makes for more tightly closed verbal art forms, especially in narrative. Until print, the only linearly plotted lengthy story line was that of the drama, which from antiquity had been controlled by writing. Euripides' tragedies were texts composed in writing and then memorized verbatim to be presented orally. With print, tight plotting is extended to the lengthy narrative, in the novel from Jane Austen's time on, and reaches its peak in the detective story. These forms will be discussed in the next chapter.

In literary theory, print gives rise ultimately to Formalism and the New Criticism, with their deep conviction that each work of verbal art is closed off in a world of its own, a 'verbal icon'. Significantly, an icon is something seen, not heard. Manuscript culture felt works of verbal art to be more in touch with the oral plenum, and never very effectively distinguished between poetry and rhetoric. More will be said of Formalism and the New Criticism also in the next chapter.

Print ultimately gives rise to the modern issue of intertextuality, which is so central a concern in phenomenological and critical circles today (Hawkes 1977, p. 144). Intertextuality refers to a literary and psychological commonplace: a text cannot be created simply out of lived experience. A novelist writes a novel because he or she is familiar with this kind of textual organization of experience.

Manuscript culture had taken intertextuality for granted. Still tied to the commonplace tradition of the old oral world, it

deliberately created texts out of other texts, borrowing, adapting, sharing the common, originally oral, formulas and themes, even though it worked them up into fresh literary forms impossible without writing. Print culture of itself has a different mindset. It tends to feel a work as 'closed', set off from other works, a unit in itself. Print culture gave birth to the romantic notions of 'originality' and 'creativity', which set apart an individual work from other works even more, seeing its origins and meaning as independent of outside influence, at least ideally. When in the past few decades doctrines of intertextuality arose to counteract the isolationist aesthetics of a romantic print culture, they came as a kind of shock. They were all the more disquieting because modern writers, agonizingly aware of literary history and of the *de facto* intertextuality of their own works, are concerned that they may be producing nothing really new or fresh at all, that they maybe totally under the 'influence' of others' texts. Harold Bloom's work *The Anxiety of Influence* (1973) treats this modern writer's anguish. Manuscript cultures had few if any anxieties about influence to plague them, and oral cultures had virtually none.

Print creates a sense of closure not only in literary works but also in analytic philosophical and scientific works. With print came the catechism and the 'textbook', less discursive and less disputatious than most previous presentations of a given academic subject. Catechisms and textbooks presented 'facts' or their equivalents: memorizable, flat statements that told straightforwardly and inclusively how matters stood in a given field. By contrast, the memorable statements of oral cultures and of residually oral manuscript cultures tended to be of a proverbial sort, presenting not 'facts' but rather reflections, often of a gnomic kind, inviting further reflection by the paradoxes they involved.

Peter Ramus (1515–72) produced the paradigms of the textbook genre: textbooks for virtually all arts subjects (dialectic or logic, rhetoric, grammar, arithmetic, etc.) that proceeded by cold-blooded definitions and divisions leading to still further definitions and more divisions, until every last particle of the subject had been dissected and disposed of. A Ramist textbook on a given subject had no acknowledged interchange with anything outside itself. Not even any difficulties or 'adversaries' appeared. A curriculum subject or 'art', if presented properly according to Ramist method, involved no difficulties at all (so Ramists maintained): if you defined and divided in the proper way, everything in the art was

completely self-evident and the art itself was complete and self-contained. Ramus relegated difficulties and refutations of adversaries to separate 'lectures' *(scholae)* on dialectic, rhetoric, grammar, arithmetic, and all the rest. These lectures lay outside the self-enclosed 'art'. Moreover, the material in each of the Ramist textbooks could be presented in printed dichotomized outlines or charts that showed exactly how the material was organized spatially in itself and in the mind. Every art was in itself completely separate from every other, as houses with intervening open spaces are separate from one another, though the arts were mingled in 'use'—that is to say, in working up a given passage of discourse, one used simultaneously logic, grammar, rhetoric, and possible other arts as well (Ong 1958b, pp. 30–1, 225–69, 280).

A correlative of the sense of closure fostered by print was the fixed point of view, which as Marshall McLuhan pointed out (1962, pp. 126–7, 135–6), came into being with print. With the fixed point of view, a fixed tone could now be preserved through the whole of a lengthy prose composition. The fixed point of view and fixed tone showed in one way a greater distance between writer and reader and in another way a greater tacit understanding. The writer could go his or her own way confidently (greater distance, lack of concern). There was no need to make everything a kind of Menippean satire, a mixture of various points of view and tone for various sensibilities. The writer could be confident that the reader would adjust (greater understanding). At this point, the 'reading public' came into existence—a sizable clientele of readers unknown personally to the author but able to deal with certain more or less established points of view.