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Peter Ramus, Walter Ong, and the Tradition of Humanistic Learning

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In the 1950's Walter Ong focused his attention on the sixteenth-century Parisian philosopher and educationalist Peter Ramus, and published the results of his research in two major works, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958a), and a *Ramus and Talon Inventory* (1958b), which listed for the first time over one thousand printings of books by Ramus in the fields of grammar, rhetoric, logic, mathematics, physics, optics, ethics, and theology. Thirty years on, as we settle down firmly into the computer age in scholarship, it is possible to appreciate fully the value of these two seminal books which have stimulated and enriched all work on Ramus since their publication.

Contemporary scholars of Ramus continue to acknowledge their indebtedness to Ong (Meerhoff 1986, Grafton and Jardine 1986, Murphy and Newlands 1986). It is true that in the last two years studies in Ramus have begun to take a rather new direction as a result of a computerized catalogue of his works, prepared at the Centre d'Histoire des Sciences et des Doctrines in Paris, which obviates the need to trudge from library to library and to handle hundreds of disparate and inadequate catalogues, and has provided the tools necessary for a clearer comparison of Ramus' textual revisions. In a recent book (1984) Mme. Bruyère-Robinet has begun the work of providing a new stemmatology, which establishes more accurately than was possible a generation ago the relation between the different editions, and, in the matter of logic, at least, has reappraised Ramus by setting out the main stages in the development of his thought against a background of a fundamental and abiding Neo-Platonism. Yet even this book owes much to Ong and it is worth stressing that without his early work the real importance of Ramus would not have been recognized and the

computerized catalogue would scarcely even have seemed worth organizing.

This is not the place to enter into a discussion about this major new study of Ramus, but I mention it here for two reasons: to show how Ong's early research has continued to have an impact on all recent scholarship on the subject, even when his interpretation is called into question, and has incited this work based on more refined techniques of information (a matter close to his own heart), and to emphasize that for Ong Ramus survives and merits our attention not so much as a profound and original thinker and a forerunner of Descartes (which he is in Mme. Bruyère-Robinet's opinion) but as the center of controversies about method (both in teaching and in scientific discovery) and about rhetoric and logic and their role in communication. Ong was able to situate Ramus in the great scholastic tradition as it came into confrontation with the new humanism of the Italian and Northern Renaissance and as it was experienced by scholars and teachers in the ancient university of Paris. His concern has been with Ramus the teacher, the educational theorist, the humanist, and the communicator, and this will be the principal concern of the present essay.

My purpose is to examine, firstly, some of Ramus's ideas on education (the close relation between art, method, and teaching; the unifying vision contained in the one method common to all teaching; the union of philosophy and eloquence) and on the teaching of literature (the theory of analysis and genesis, the need for universal knowledge, the freedom and harmony which learning brings with it); secondly, Ong's views on teaching, especially of literature (the commonplace tradition in rhetoric, the relation of Latin to the vernacular in teaching and communication, orality, the high moral purpose of the teacher, the integral humanist vision); and, thirdly, to say something briefly about how the study of Ramus and of Ong's evaluation of him help towards an understanding of the role of the teacher today and his place in the humanist tradition. I shall suggest that the teacher of literature today should still aim at an encyclopedic ideal, even though its realization is less and less possible, that breadth of vision is just as important as ever, and indeed that the study of literature must embrace all kinds of communication if his subject is to remain, as it should, at the center of the humanities.

I

Peter Ramus gave himself entirely to his teaching, either in the classrooms of his various colleges, or in the lecture-hall of the university, or at the Collège Royal (now the Collège de France), the alternative university set up by François Premier, or again in the publication of textbooks or pedagogically oriented monographs. If we try to define what teaching meant for him, what theory lay behind it, we find ourselves faced with several related terms which keep recurring in his writing. Together with his contemporaries he uses “ars” almost synonymously with “scientia,” “disciplina,” “methodus,” “professio,” and even “virtus” and “sapientia.” Other words such as “doctrina” and “*mathêsis*” are also linked with “ars,” and behind all of them is the idea that an art is a way of teaching. As Ong notes, *natura* is “more or less implied as the complement of any and all of these” and it is the idea of teaching, more particularly the teaching of philosophy, which binds them together: “Dominating the passage from early discourse-knowledge to observation-knowledge stands the all-important figure of the teacher” (1958a:156, 149, 151).

Of all these near-synonyms it is method which people now associate most readily with the name of Ramus. The direct link with teaching is best seen in a pamphlet he published in 1557, *Quod sit unica doctrinae instituendae methodus*, taken from the ninth and tenth books of his *Animadversiones Aristotelicae*. In his attempt to find a universal formula to explain reality and to demonstrate the relatedness of all branches of knowledge, he fastens onto the unifying factor that there is one method applicable to the resolution of all problems, one common doctrine of invention, a theory which was for him far from being a mere logical or rhetorical exercise, since all discourse, not just teaching, was founded upon it. This doctrine of invention is compared to a river (sometimes the Tiber, sometimes the Seine) with its many uses—drinking, washing, irrigation, cleansing, putting out fires, transport: “nor are there individual streams set aside for all these purposes, but the whole river is of such a nature that it is useful for each and every one of them; similarly the doctrine of invention is universally applicable” (1549:47). Each art retains its special aim and approach, yet the same logic pervades all teaching and there is a common ultimate purpose: “The ends and teaching-procedures of all arts should be separated from one another, but they should be united in their usefulness; we see the

same thing in the possession of farms and fields—my field should not make inroads into yours, nor yours into mine, but when we buy, sell or exchange produce, they should have common usefulness” (1569:237; Ong 1982:135). In his *Pro philosophica disciplina*, in a justification of his own practice of teaching, the metaphor of utility is enriched by one of fruitfulness: “In farming there are crops, trees, vines, herds and cattle which all demand a particular kind of treatment: we leave the stubble in the fields and carry home the grain; we leave the trees in the orchard and carry home the apples; we leave the beasts in the pasture and carry home the abundance of milk and fleeces; we give them all a common usefulness in feeding, nourishing, and clothing the body. So it should be in the nourishment of the mind: its various parts should be catered for in different ways” (1569:1020). In this broad view of the encyclopedia of the arts compared to the rich variety of nature, Ramus is searching for a unified vision, and it is in method that he finds it.

This one and only method of teaching all subjects is not exactly what modern educationalists call “teaching method” but simply logic, even though, as Ong says, “it is adopted from classroom procedures and rhetorical manuals without any closely reasoned foundation in formal logic” (1971:84-85). It was the same pedagogical principle which made Ramus refer so often to Solon’s Law, according to which there should always be a space between two adjoining properties and between walls around properties: in spite of their common utility subjects taught should always be kept apart (Ong 1958a:280-81; 1977:175).

Yet for all this apparent desire for demarcation Ramus was above all favorable to cross-fertilization between the disciplines. There was one area in particular in which he was more concerned with linking subjects than with keeping them apart, and that was the celebrated union of philosophy and eloquence. This was a common enough topic of Renaissance theorists, as they drew upon Cicero and ultimately Aristotle. In 1546 Ramus alluded to it in his commentary on Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* and in his inaugural lecture at the Collège de Presles, *Oratio de studiis philosophiae et eloquentiae conjungendis*. In his *Pro philosophica disciplina* he further justifies his own educational theories about the union and explains his own practice.

In the eyes of some of his contemporaries, however, Ramus was a good teacher neither of philosophy nor of literature, and

with reference to literature at least it is difficult not to sympathize with these critics. The only works of literary criticism, if we may call it that, which we have from his pen are his commentaries on Virgil's *Georgics* and *Bucolics* and on some of Cicero's speeches. The approach is biographical, formalistic, and moralizing: the primary concern is with the identification of tropes and figures, though Ramus did accept that pleasure was a valid if incidental aim of reading poetry. Moreover, in spite of this mechanistic attitude to literature, he often expounded the theory, frequently found at the time, of *analysis* and *genesis* as the principles by which existing texts are to be studied and by which students may be helped to engage in creative writing. Analysis of a work is the methodical examination of it and genesis is the "bringing into being of a new work" (a phrase which he later altered to "similar or even better works, as Aristotle showed"). Even analysis is not pure contemplation of the work since it involves the process of unraveling (*analuein, retexere*) (1549:175; 1569:304; Ong 1958:191, 263). By genesis the student carries on this process and produces something original. This dual theory is the basis of Ramus' views on imitation, and his theory of imitation is at the center of his views on education. For him, as for Aristotle, all learning progresses by imitation and is finally synonymous with the ascent to wisdom. The theory of imitation, clearly presented in the *Ciceronianus*, bears witness to Ramus' humanist outlook: he wished to reinstate genuine classical learning, to liberalize education, to link all disciplines in a harmonious body of knowledge.

Yet even with his humanist aspirations, Ramus remains ill at ease about literature and in particular about poetry. He did share the opinions of most of his contemporaries about poetic fury and divine inspiration, and like them he thought that poets were born not made, yet in spite of this elevated vision of the role of the poet, he could not bring himself to believe that poetry was a serious pursuit, and all are agreed that he himself lacked poetic sensibility (Ong 1958a:281-83; 1971:177).

Ramus often returned to the question of the relation of poetry to the other arts of discourse. He was of the opinion that poetry, rhetoric, and logic all use the same language, more or less, and that they share a common logic and a common prudence (that is, spontaneity of judgment). They all aim to persuade, and they are so interrelated that the practitioner of any one art should be

well-versed in all the others, and in many other arts besides. A knowledge of music or mathematics, he thought, will not make a man a better grammarian, but it should make him a fuller man, and therefore a better teacher of grammar. This theory was a corollary of the Renaissance ideal of the universal man. Ramus insists that orators should be absolutely familiar with the encyclopedia of all the arts, but adds (and here he is attacking Cicero) that these should all be subservient to rhetoric. According to Cicero, he writes, the perfect orator “shares in all the arts,” but Ramus contends that what Cicero is describing is the perfect citizen, the accomplished politician. When Quintilian adds that the orator must have the virtues of prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance and a knowledge of philosophy, law, history, and the rest, Ramus agrees but wishes to exclude this from the art of rhetoric (1569:236, 242-43, 320). In fact, for Ramus, the perfect philosopher and the perfect historian need eloquence more than the orator needs a knowledge of philosophy or history.

The French poets of the Pléiade group, some of whom were acquaintances of Ramus, shared the high ideal of learning a poet or orator should have. Du Bellay, for example, in the *Deffence et Illustration de la Langue Française*, wrote: “L’office donques de l’orateur est de chacune chose proposée elegamment et copieusement parler. Or ceste faculté de parler ainsi de toutes choses ne se peut acquerir que par l’intelligence parfaite des Sciences.” Du Bellay does not really differentiate between the poet and the orator in this respect, as may be seen from his address to the poet in the chapter ‘Du long poeme François’: “Donques, ô toy, qui doué d’une excellente felicité de nature, instruit de tous bons Ars et Sciences, principalement naturelles et mathématiques, versé en tous genres de bons aucteurs Grecz et Latins, non ignorant des parties et offices de la vie humaine, non de trop haulte condition, ou appellé au regime publiq. . . ô toy (dy-je) orné de tant de graces et perfections. . .” (1549:33, 127-28). Peletier in his *Art poétique* makes even clearer the accomplishments which the poet must have: “Je n’e donq pas ici grand besoin de dire, qu’à notre Poete est necessere la connoissance d’Astrologie, Cosmografie, Geometrie, Phisique, brief de toute la Filosofie” (1555:216-17). The humanist scholar-poet Marc-Antoine Muret in a speech which he made in Venice claimed that the teacher of literature must share this high ideal of learning, since he has to explain everything contained in the books he is talking about; he

must acquire a real taste for all the liberal arts, even if he cannot achieve a deep knowledge of them. Muret even asks if it is possible for someone to be a competent critic of poetry if he is not familiar with astronomy and geography (1555:26).

Ramus, for his part, is clear about the ultimate purpose of such encyclopedic learning. In the end learning liberates man: it has a sedative effect on unruly desires and restores harmony to the soul under the rule of reason. This may be seen from his praise of *mathêsis* which closes the *Dialecticae partitiones* of 1543, a passage already present in a rather different form in the earlier manuscript version recently published by Mme. Bruyère-Robinet. *Mathêsis* frees man from all his earthly limitations, gives him peace and harmony, makes him greater than the universe, and leads him to his true heavenly country, the contemplation of divine light and wisdom (1984:52-54).

Ramus never lost the desire for universal harmony and the rule of reason expressed in this Neo-Platonic and Christian conclusion to the very first work he published. For practical purposes his educational theory kept apart the different branches of learning, yet he had no doubt of their interconnection and of the need for a sense of wholeness and universality which would bring them together.

II

A glance at the bibliography of Ong's works shows that while he has continued on occasion to concern himself directly with Ramus, he has moved away from his original study of Ramus as a pointer toward literary, cultural, social, and philosophical shifts to a consideration of more basic questions about knowledge, communication (the *artes sermocinales*), and education (which is primarily "the study of the word" [1962:10]); all of these ideas he has developed in his far-sighted and wide-ranging works on orality and literature, humanism and technology, and the evolution of consciousness.

His initial study of Ramus took into account the history of writing and printing, and the effects that developments in ways of transmitting knowledge have had on thought-processes and modes of perceiving the world and learning about it. With his dichotomized tables (which Ong once compared to the binary organization of computer flow-charts [1977:177]), Ramus exemplified the swing from essentially oral/aural culture which the Middle Ages

inherited from antiquity to the visually ordered culture of the Renaissance, and a study of Ramus helps us to understand the cultural implications of the electronic revolution.

Such a study is also valuable as an aid to understanding the history of the teaching of literature and its place in the humanities. Ong has shown more than once, but nowhere better than in his "Tudor Writings on Rhetoric, Poetic, and Literary Theory" (1971:48-103), how central Ramus' reforms in rhetoric and logic were to changing views of criticism, and he has applied similar criteria to later critical theories up to structuralism and beyond. An excellent practical application of the study of Renaissance modes of thought is to be found in his treatment of the ever-present commonplace tradition, best seen in Johannes Textor's *Epitheta* or *Officina*, Erasmus' *Adagia* and *Apophthegmata*, and in Theodore Zwinger's *Theatrum humanae vitae*. One thinks of Ong's masterful unraveling of Shakespeare's sonnet 129, "Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame," which shows its dependence on this tradition (1977:181-88).

Among the other ways in which a knowledge of Ramus and his milieu enhances our understanding of subsequent literature and thought are the role of learned Latin in relation to the emergent vernaculars (Ramus' world was bilingual in Latin and French) and the highly polemical form of Renaissance discourse which underlines the agonistic structure of much of human experience (Ong 1971:113-41; 1981).

Perhaps Ong's greatest contribution to the study of literature is to be found in his emphasis, from his earliest writings onwards, on the oral rather than the written. This can be summed up in a phrase from *Orality and Literacy*: "The basic orality of language is permanent" (1982:7). Ong recognizes that there have been recent studies, more and more of them, which take account of orality, and yet "literary history on the whole still proceeds with little if any awareness of orality-literacy polarities, despite the importance of these polarities in the development of genres, plot, characterization, writer-reader relationships, and the relationship of literature to social, intellectual and psychic structures" (1982:157). The reason for this stress on written texts instead of orality, he explains, is that writing is necessary for abstract and analytic study (1982:8-9). Nonetheless, the teacher of literature must remain aware of the importance of the spoken word.

It is difficult to separate the teaching of literature from

teaching in general. This is especially so in the case of the exalted Renaissance ideal we have just considered. Ong's ideal is no less exacting. In *The Barbarian Within* he writes, "In the person of the teacher, who is the depository and communicator of knowledge, mankind constantly reviews what it knows, reevaluates its knowledge, revises it, detects its deficiencies, and sets up the framework for new discoveries" (1962:220). The three main points of this lapidary definition have equal importance. Firstly, the teacher communicates most often *orally*, even if he also writes, and in this way transmits learning from one generation to the next; there is a strong sense, here, too, of the corporate nature of learning both through the ages ("Diachronic integrity must always be honored" [1979:392]) and across society through the world today. Secondly, the role of the teacher is to question, and not to succumb to the permanent occupational risk of sclerosis of thought and presentation. (The force of this danger can easily be seen from satirical literature and from an examination of the history of words concerning teaching which so often suffer downgrading: academic, scholastic, dogmatic, pedagogue, and pedant). Thirdly, Ong's statement evinces confidence in the future of learning, and optimism for mankind.

When we turn to the special role of the teacher of literature, we find that he bears an even greater responsibility. Ong stresses that the professional work of such a teacher is more directly related to his own life and ego than in many other occupations. His work invites and obliges him to talk frankly about his total response to literature, thought, and life, and to enter openly into a personal relationship of trust with his students (1979:388-91). This authentic engagement of the whole personality is of a piece with the ultimate harmony of all truth and knowledge. In an article entitled "Literature, Threat and Conquest" Ong wrote: "For the teaching of literature cannot stand alone. It engages the entire personality at its most profound depths, psychological, philosophical, sociological, and religious. It both needs and fosters other disciplines" (1966:623). Now it is clear that Ong's own approach to the teaching of literature bears this out admirably, both in the matter of authenticity and in the range of interests, which have gone well beyond English literature and the intellectual history of the sixteenth century. His interest in psychiatry in the humanities is well known, as is his study of sociobiology and "noobiology," which he describes as "the study of the biological setting of mental

activity” (1981:11). Such concerns are not the result of chance but are part of a deliberate program and a conscious ideal for the teacher. In the preface to *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology* (1971), he refers to a question which preoccupied Ramus: “Cicero used to make the point that the orator needed to know everything that could be known. Hence rhetoric, the art of oratory or public speaking, ultimately took all knowledge as its province. Cicero was not voicing merely a private hope or theory. For most of classical antiquity rhetoric was the focus of learning and intelligence, the foundation and culmination of the humanities and of a liberal education” (1971:vii; 1981:126). We have seen that according to one Renaissance theory, the teacher of literature took over this role, and Ong is suggesting that he should still preserve it today. His work must remain the focal point for studies in language and indeed in other forms of communication.

According to Ong, the first subject that the teacher of literature needs to know about is communication itself, and the “interaction of expression and culture,” to borrow the sub-title of *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology*. The teacher of literature has evolved out of the teacher of the humanities, but there is no reason why he should have discarded his earlier role. In an article entitled “Crisis and Understanding in the Humanities,” written almost twenty years ago, Ong noted: “One can also take the humanities in the larger sense as the study of man in his relationship to the entire human life-world, thus including such subjects as philosophy and anthropology and history. And once history is admitted, almost everything can be got in, directly or indirectly, under one or another perfectly honest rubric” (1971:307). The teacher of literature, or of the humanities, for it is increasingly difficult to separate the two, must therefore know something of all these disciplines. It is only by becoming aware of the all-embracing nature of his subject that the teacher of literature will be able to meet the attacks on the humanities. As Ong has shown, literature and the humanities have nothing to fear from science and the technological explosion. In his presidential address to the Modern Language Association in 1978, he affirmed that, “Language and literature study can assimilate everything in the human life-world, including technology” (1979:393). Modern communication and information technology is not essentially different from that involved in the first Sumerian cuneiforms, the first writing with ink, or the first printing from moveable type.

All technology (and does not *technê* mean art and *logos* reason?) is simply part of the history and evolution of man's spirit. Ong shows, after Havelock, how Plato's strictures on writing in the *Phaedrus* and the Seventh Letter drew attention to the relative advantages of oral communication over writing using the same arguments as are now sometimes used against computers (dehumanization of the living world, destruction of memory, weakening of the mind [1981:125; 1982:79, 167]). Ong notes further that modern technological society is no more depersonalized than earlier society, and indeed that personalist philosophy is a product of our society alone (1981:200).

The unifying thread in this view of teaching is to be found in *The Presence of the Word*. The argument leads from Ong's profound inner conviction about nature and mankind as a way to God, to a consideration of God's presence in the world and in us, and of the Word in the church (1967:*passim*; 1981:193). No doubt many readers will part company with him here in much the same way that readers of Ramus may accept the account of method and reject the Neo-Platonist eulogy of *mathêsis* or the Zwinglian *Commentarii de religione Christiana*; as some readers of Pascal's *Pensées* delight in his finely observed social and psychological description of mankind's wretched condition, without being prepared to make the leap into the absurd contained in the wager that God exists and that Christianity is true; or again as some readers may admire Teilhard de Chardin's account of the palaeontological origins of "Le Phénomène humain" without accepting his theories of the evolution of the mind. Yet as Ong says, "Science is born of a vision of completeness" (1962:271) and "Knowledge is ultimately not a fractioning but a unifying phenomenon, a striving for harmony. Without harmony, an interior condition, the psyche is in bad health" (1982:72). Ong shares with all the writers I have just mentioned a view of the world which can best be described by the title of a book by the neo-scholastic writer Jacques Maritain, *L'humanisme intégral* (though Ramus stands apart from the others in that his world-view is closed whereas theirs is open). For Ong the word "catholic" means not so much "universal" as "expansive" (1977:330). In *Orality and Literacy* he comments that "orality-literacy dynamics enter integrally into the modern evolution of consciousness towards both greater interiorization and greater openness" (1982:179). This position is very close to that outlined by Teilhard in *Le Phénomène humain*, especially if we add

to it the notion of “complexification” which necessarily accompanies openness.

III

I should like to add some concluding reflections on the teaching of literature and the humanities today, arising from my discussion of the views of Ramus and Ong. I agree with the remarks of Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* that a student cannot learn literature in the way that he can learn physics, but that he can only learn about it; what he learns is criticism and this is all that the teacher of literature teaches (1957:11). I agree also with Jonathan Culler that there is such an accomplishment as “literary competence” (1977:64); otherwise the formal study of literature would be in vain, and I wish to propose the Ramist-like definition that the study of literature is “ars bene legendi.” Now learning criticism, acquiring literary competence, and mastering the art of reading all call for the presence of a teacher of wide accomplishments and great breadth of vision.

The traditional view of what literature is, who should teach it, and how this should be done still lingers on where it does not flourish. The study of literature is still often restricted to printed texts, usually of imaginative writing in the three most obvious genres, recognizably serious and of high quality. This view is often supported by a strong feeling that the teacher of literature should restrict himself to his own discipline and preferably to his own specialization within the field of literature.

It is evident, however, that the concept of literature has evolved through the ages and that it continues to do so (Williams 1977:26-27); it seems equally evident, therefore, that the scope and subject of the teacher of literature must evolve in the same measure. My contention is that, at a time when the relation of writing to other forms of communication is changing almost beyond recognition, the teacher of literature should redefine his role before it is too late. It is true that some have seen this for a generation and more, and may even be astounded to learn that old ideas die so hard. Yet the simple fact is that not everyone accepts that the history of education is organic and evolutionary and that all parts of it are in a continual process of transformation; as Ong says, “Education must be in a constant state of reforming itself” (1962:150); and as sections of the discipline become atrophied, they can evolve no further and so become extinct.

The scope of the teacher of literature must be extensive enough to include writing of all kinds, not just imaginative writing (even if this is the real heart of his subject) but discursive texts, philosophical, scientific, political, social, and in all registers, including, and possibly even favoring, what is popular and ephemeral.

There is no need in this place to plead the case for the study of the oral expression of a culture. Yet sadly not all university teachers of literature seem aware of the importance of what Ong has called the “purely oral art-form” (1982:107). This vast domain, still imperfectly mapped, should not be neglected by the teacher of literature, whether he is interested simply in the “oral residue” in literature, to borrow the title of one of Ong’s articles (1971:23), in the pervading presence of the rhetorical tradition, or in the clearly established forms of orality. His brief should include the study of all modern forms of discourse and communication, primarily radio, television, and film as well as the performing arts, and in so far as is possible, he will practice creative writing and encourage it in his students.

The use of computers, too, will be part of his work in that they provide new forms of organizing knowledge, of thinking, and of looking at the world. He should be aware of the possibilities of communal creative writing with the help of computers (I am thinking of experiments such as those conducted in connection with the recent exhibition at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, *Les Immatériaux* [Lyotard and Chaput 1985]). He should go beyond a whole-hearted acceptance of computers in the humanities to an attempt to define the role of the humanities in computer studies and information technology.

This redefinition of the role of the teacher of literature is, of course, ambitious. We can no longer expect him to acquire the encyclopedic knowledge which the Renaissance demanded of the universal man: this is formally excluded by the explosion of knowledge which has already taken place and which is continuing at an ever-increasing rate. One of the greatest problems of modern education is that of specialization. Teilhard’s remark about evolution could be aptly applied here, “La spécialisation paralyse et l’ultra-spécialisation tue” (1955:173). But at least the modern teacher should have a Socratic awareness of the limitations to his knowledge and a curiosity about other fields of study. A course on modern French humanism, for example, can include Claude

Lévi-Strauss, Le Corbusier, and Teilhard, and this will call for some knowledge of social anthropology, mathematics, paleontology, and nuclear physics. More generally, he should be abreast of contemporary philosophy and of problems—moral, social, psychological, and educational—raised by new scientific developments. Universal knowledge remains the ideal even if we are moving further away from attaining it, and here we might adopt Ong's glossing of "universal" ("catholic") as "expansive" (1977:330). In our present relativist age it is no longer possible to accept the bounds of Ramus's encyclopedia, however much we may admire his enthusiastic, all-embracing view of the arts and sciences; it was a perfect circle, it is true, but a closed one, in keeping with pre-Copernican cosmology. Our vision, on the other hand, should be expansive and outward-looking.

We are now at the beginning of a new educational revolution which will go far beyond the exciting experiments of the 1960's. It is necessary to set out afresh the aims of the study of literature and its place in humane studies and studies in communication. Literature, widely understood, must remain at the center of such studies, but its teachers must become more and more aware of the expanding circumference. The aim of a liberal education is the understanding of human consciousness in relation to the world, and of its expression of itself by speech (oral, written, and electronically transmitted), as well as by all other forms of communication.

The work of Peter Ramus and Walter Ong, two great educators and communicators, is solidly centered within the long humanist tradition in education, and a study of it is of permanent relevance and help in evaluating the present and in planning for the future.

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