John Milton said that his mother bore him a speaker of what God had made his own, rather than a translator of other men’s thoughts, but at times, both as Latin Secretary to Cromwell’s regime, and on his own motion, he is found laboriously transmitting the words of someone else. When in 1672 he published his *Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio* he included a sample Analytic Praxis lifted bodily from George Downham’s *Commentarii in P. Rami Dialecticam*, plus a “Life of Peter Ramus taken from Johann Thomas Freigius”, *recisis digressionibus*, “with the digressions cut away”.

As the sometime schoolteacher, sometime compiler of textbooks and dictionaries, Milton understood the utility of including a brief biography of the founder of that system of thought from which he took so much. Peter Ramus was in many ways an appealing figure to him, as the storm center of controversies, as a quasi-apostle of freedom of inquiry, and as (possibly) a martyr of St. Bartholomew’s Day. In Freigius’ *Petri Rami Vita* he had a ready made account, sparing himself the need for extended research, but obviously, to Milton’s eye, an account grossly wasteful of space and the reader’s attention.

Milton gives no indication of which edition he used. He may have taken his text from the 1575 Basel edition of Ramus’ *Praelectiones in Ciceronis Oratones Octo Consulares*, handsomely printed in forty-one quarto pages of italic type, or from the 1599 Marburg edition of *Petri Rami & Audomari Talaei Collectaneae Praefationes, Epistolae, Orationes* which reprinted Freigius’ *Life of Ramus* rather less handsomely, and with a scattering of typographical errors.

The heavy emphasis on formal logic and Ramist phraseology in Milton’s *Tetrachordon*, 1645, strongly suggests that “circa 1645” is a most likely date for the first draft of *Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio*. Milton’s cut down version of Freigius could have been done at that time, or at any time up to 1672. A search for dating clues proves singularly barren in results. The original full text of Freigius’ *Life of Ramus* is marked by many distinctive details (names, events) but none of these show up in Milton’s other writings. In fact, the details which are most individually characteristic of Freigius are the items most likely to be excised in Milton’s version. Milton’s additions are few, matters of phraseology rather than of fact, and nothing so specific as to serve as an indicator of date. Rarely did Milton do so objective a job, with so little of himself put into it.

There is one sentence whose omission by Milton may be indicative of an early date, circa 1645. Freigius tells us that Ramus had little to do with physic, being a temperate man in good health, *nisi quod aliquantisper opthalmia laborasse dicitur, qua forsitan perpetuis studiis & lucubrationis contraxerat* (1575, page 35). It would seem that at any time after 1648, when Milton’s eyes were troubling him seriously, this line would have been retained.

Whatever art there is in Milton’s version is strictly the editorial art of the ruthless blue pencil. The entire performance is a study in condensation. Milton cuts away fully five-sixths of the text, but succeeds in retaining almost everything of significance. This was in line with Milton’s own habits of composition: “I have been told also he would dictate many, perhaps 40 lines as it were in a breath, and then reduce them to half the number” (Jonathan Richardson’s “Life of Milton”, in Helen Darbishire’s *Early Lives of John Milton*, 112
Freigius was given to a diffuse style. He writes Ramus natus est anno salutis nostrae millesimo quingentesimo decimo quinto; Milton cuts out salutis nostrae. Freigius moralized: At Christianus P. Ramus fuit, nec unquam paupertatem malum putavit. Milton slashed that out, with its accompanying homily against being discouraged by hardships. Freigius decorates his itinerary of Ramus' visits to German cities with flowery apostrophes: Quid Augustanarum matronarum venustatem potius, quam Romanae cuiusdam antiquitatis gravitatem commemorem? Milton strips that narrative down to the barest facts. He omits Freigius' ornamental quotations from Vergil, his extracts from Ramus and Talaeus, and the parable of Jesus with the blind man.

The Latin of Milton's version is still Freigius' Latin. Many sentences are reproduced verbatim, or with such minor changes as a shift from first person quotation to third person indirect discourse, or a change in tense of verb to conform to a curtailed paragraph. Occasionally there is substitution of one word for another: where Freigius had Ramus vixit celibate, Milton preferred permansit.

Some revisions were required by the difference in editorial circumstances. Freigius suggests a date as being probably in Ramus' twenty-eighth year, adding nisi fallor. Milton force edits that phrase for his text into ut putatur (which is mistranslated in the Columbia edition as "what is called"). A parallel reading of these two lives of Ramus indicates that to do a fully correct translation of Milton's text into English, constant reference should be made to what he read in Freigius.

The Miltonic version is not a rewrite. Not only words and sentences but the sequence remains that of Freigius. Using the Columbia edition for convenience, one finds that of the text in volume XI, page 496-514, only lines 1-19 on page 506; lines 2-9 on page 510; and lines 1-2 on page 514 have been moved out of Freigius' order, for the sake of grouping related matter.

If the touch of a skillful artist is felt at all, it is in the cutting; Milton adds no graces of his own as he strips off those of Freigius. One touch of the artist's hand is perhaps seen in the passage in which Freigius describes Ramus as a man large of stature, robust in health, into which Milton moves, from another context, the effective words vultus mitissimo.

In such a framework one hardly expects any new revelations on Milton. Rather one is hard put to find the customary indicia ordinarily expected in anything from Milton's hand. What is most impressive is Milton's feeling for economy of expression. Several times Milton the arch-controversialist even suppresses a tendentious remark by Freigius. Freigius (1575, page 10) wrote Magistrandum (ut barbari barbarare vocant). Milton smoothed it down to Magistrandum (ut vocant). Striking is the omission of this most forthright statement on freedom of inquiry (would it have been deleted by Milton in the same year he wrote Areopagitica?):

Summa semper libertas fuit grammaticis, rhetoribus, mathematicis, philosophis, contra grammaticos, rhetores, mathematicos, philosophos dicendi & scribendi: eaque libertas, quia ad omnium artium perfectionem pertinere magnopere videbatur, maxime probata est, & omnium philosophorum, Aristotelis praeertim, praecipit unice commendata.

Does this omission, possibly, date rather to a 1672 revision of Milton's old draft on the advice of his friends, under those conditions of constraint and caution which characterize his
1673 Of True Religion and his consent to his friends' counsel to suppress the answer he had dictated about that time against the "little scribbling quack", as recalled by Edward Phillips?

Milton retains from Freigius the case of a Paris priest on trial for grammatical heresy, for trying to correct the Sorbonne in its Frenchified pronunciation of Latin qu as k. Yet here too the narrative is cut to the bone, and there is no hint that Milton used to complain that his Englishmen would still pronounce Latin as if it were English.

The most conspicuous omission of material information in Milton's digest is in regards to names of people. A considerable catalogue of minor sixteenth century intellectuals could be compiled from Freigius' references: the two judges who favored Ramus' cause at the Paris hearing, and the many dignitaries and scholars with whom Ramus corresponded or met. Milton omits many of these names, retaining (mainly) those who still had some note in his time, some of whom still do, Melanchthon, Tremellius, Tycho Brahe, Sturm of Strasbourg, Andrew Melville, Acontius. Among the names editorially consigned to oblivion by Milton was Erasmus Oswald Schreckenfuchs of Friburg, together with his remarkable celestial sphere after the scheme of Copernicus: he was Freigius' father-in-law. Milton's feelings towards bis father-in-law were quite negative. Perhaps that was why the blue pencil at this point over-skidded the mark, and took out Freigius' next mention of Ramus' stop at Basel. Else why is that city alone omitted of Ramus' whole route?

There is one peculiar slip in Freigius' grandiloquence: he speaks of "Pericles" as the Athenian leader at Marathon, instead of Miltiades. Whatever Milton thought of this error (it is reprinted in the 1599 edition), it disappears together with its setting in a rhetorical question which Milton discards along with so many other literary artifices.

Some of the trivial personal anecdotes are retained, some are scratched. The incident in Ramus' childhood, in which he innocently guzzled himself into insensibility in the parental winecellar, is retained to explain his later abstinence. His straw pallet, his refusal to take pay from pupils, are baldly related; and from more than three pages of Freigius' elegancies of peroration, following the tragic death of Ramus, Milton as baldly lifts the single, almost statistical, anticlimactic sentence that Ramus left a munificent legacy for a mathematics professorship at Paris. Nothing could say more plainly that this biographical sketch was strictly utilitarian, with no literary or artistic intention.

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