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**The Use and Abuse of 'Types' of Ruskin's
*Seven Lamps of Architecture***

Critical terminology as such is a recent problem in literary criticism. Canonical works of criticism seem to pose no terminological obstacles. Sidney's apology for poetry, Johnson's preface to Shakespeare, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* or Pater's essays on the renaissance all present radically different concepts of reference, the autonomy of poetry or the role of human imagination, but it would appear futile to define these differences by examining each critic's terminology. Each critic leads us back to Aristotle and such fundamental terms as metaphor, mimesis or more specialized but equally familiar terms such as harmony, fable, or the various genres. These critics rely upon traditional terminology to state original theses about the nature of poetry. The situation seems to be entirely different with a critic such as Jacques Derrida or Harold Bloom. Bloom may cite Quintillian in support of his own definition of metalepsis and Jacques Derrida may claim that he is uncovering ambiguities already inherent in Aristotle's usage of mimesis, but we sense, perhaps intuitively, that an abuse has occurred. The critic's terminology has become as opaque as the text to which it, supposedly, refers. Derrida or Bloom respond to such criticism by arguing that all criticism is abusive, improper, that every critical term is inevitably a catachresis. The more deviant the terminology the more faithful it is to literature itself — so the argument goes. The terminology of *clinamen*, *askesis* and *apophrades*, or the endless play upon terms such as *Qual* and *Quelle*, becomes a rhetorical exercise, a demonstration of the instability of all critical terminologies.¹ There can be no abuse when there is no proper use. A critical text becomes a translation or metaphor of its object text rather than a commentary upon it.

Hostility to the critical terminology of Bloom or Derrida most often takes the weak form of a protest against jargon. But jargon is not at all the issue. This hostility would be better spent upon the terminolo-

gies of Russian Formalism, structural linguistics or semiology. The Saussurean terminology of signifier/signified, or Jakobson's technical applications of the traditional tropes metaphor and metonymy—the terminology, in short, of descriptive poetics—achieves its rigor and precision by excluding, or temporarily bracketing, the hermeneutic questions of meaning and reference. The text is treated as an autonomous linguistic structure with its own arbitrary patterns of signification, based, for example, on rhyme or syntactic parallelism rather than reason or sense-experience. Such limited analyses have their value, but the analysis depends upon a narrowly defined, quasi-scientific jargon or “metalanguage.” Simple description of the “production” of meaning is possible only through a purified terminology detached from the semantic complexity of any poem. Semiology, at its best, in Roland Barthes for example, admits the inevitable contamination of any metalanguage. (See the last chapter of *Elements of Semiology*) Poetics thus returns us to the skepticism of post-structuralist criticism.

For all their seeming differences, however, traditional terms such as metaphor, synecdoche and metonymy are linked to the radical (ab) use to which they have been put by contemporary critics. Contemporary critics perhaps throw away their best insights when they play casually with their presumably hard-won insights into the indeterminacy or instability of poetic reference. The task is to reveal the same indeterminacy in Coleridge's *Biographia* or Sidney's apology. Use and abuse are dialectically related, as are literal and figurative usages of a word, or object-language and metalanguage. How do we recognize what might be called, paradoxically, a “proper abuse?” Proper abuses, I shall argue, are not wilful plays upon a word or the trivial invention of a nonce-term, but the inevitable deflection of meaning within the critical attempt to use a term in a singular sense. Proper abuses have an element of “psychic resistance,” as Empson called it: we recognize the impropriety of term's application, its abuse, but cannot see any way of avoiding this abuse. Such abuses concern the nature of tropes.

A term of exemplary critical abuse, as I conceive it, is “type.” “Type” is a term that traverses the Pauline doctrine of Biblical typology, German hermeneutics, classical aesthetics, and the nineteenth century doctrine of realism.² Indeed, George Landow has recently argued that typology is at the very conceptual foundation of Victorian poetry, painting and historiography; he compares the Victorian usage of the term “type” to a dictionary of Victorian culture.³ Any interpretation of Victorian culture that mistakes or overlooks the significance of types is as futile as translating a text with half a dictionary. Landow's bold claim is worth investigating, for it is explicitly based upon a massive shift, within Victorian culture, from deviant abuses of the

term to proper uses of it. At first, Landow tells us, the "arcane" method of Biblical typology seemed to be confined to some of Ruskin's scattered writings. But, having deciphered these, Landow began to see connections with Pre-Raphaelitism, the aesthetic movement, Victorian theology and so forth. Finally, Landow states, in a complete reversal of his original position, "I had become convinced that, with the obvious exception of Arnold, every major Victorian poet employs typology in some manner." Perfect use, in the end, seems to cancel all previous abuses. Or, perhaps in a truly typological fashion, Landow has come to see that abuses, in Ruskin, are merely shadowy anticipations of the revealed Victorian proper use of types. I want to examine closely Ruskin's brief essay on the "type of sacrifice" in Victorian Gothic Revival architecture, for this text is Landow's point of departure.⁴ The text is at once a use and an abuse of the doctrine of typology. But first it may be useful to sketch some of the complexities in the term "type" as they have been brilliantly defined by Erich Auerbach. Landow is as indebted to Auerbach as he is to Ruskin.

Auerbach's extraordinary discussion of the etymology and semantics of allied terms such as *morphe*, *eidos*, and *typos* and, later, *figura*, *allegoria*, *umbra* and *historia* involves him, implicitly, in a theory of critical use and abuse; for the term *figura*, the descendant of *typos*, achieves a distinct meaning by becoming a proper meaning, by resisting "allegorical" abuse. Figural or typological interpretations of the Bible are by definition proper, while allegorical interpretations are open to all sorts of abuse. Until the time of Tertullian, *allegoria* and *figura* are practically synonymous: each implies a "deeper meaning" in any phenomenal event. With the development of the Church Fathers' doctrine of typological interpretation, however, the terms diverge: one "could not write that *Adam est allegoria Christi*," for the hidden connection between Adam and Christ within the scheme of redemption must be conveyed in terms of a certain formal resemblance. *Figura* combines hidden meaning with appearance, while allegory attaches no lasting significance to the particular appearance of the concept for which it stands. Proper types, or figures, are distinguished from allegories and shadows further by their substantive existence. In an allegory, say for example Giotto's fresco of Charity, a well defined image stands for an abstract meaning, but the image has no claim to actual existence. The figure of Charity imitates or realizes the concept of charity in an accidental or secondary fashion. Types, however, are syntheses of form and meaning. Moses really did exist. He delivered the Levitical laws of sacrifice which Christ later fulfilled and simultaneously negated. Moses is not merely an allegory of Christ, but

at the same time he is not complete in and of himself. He prefigures Christ; resemblances may be drawn between the two figures.

The essential principle of a type, according to Auerbach, is that "there is no choice between historical and hidden meaning; both are present. The figural structure preserves the historical event while interpreting it as a revelation; and must preserve it in order to interpret it" (p. 68). When intellectual significance may be abstracted from the historical or literal character of an event, type becomes allegory. Preservation is no easy matter, however. The closest modern analogue to the type that Auerbach is able to discover is the Hegelian *Aufhebung*. The historical event must be cancelled and preserved at one and the same time. By the same token, we may err by dwelling on the specifics of the type's historical character. Then we fail to realize that the fulfilment of one event by another is the higher reality. Christ neither cancels Moses completely, nor reduces Moses to allegory; rather, he fulfills the Mosaic law of sacrifice.

The semantic and hermeneutic difficulties of Auerbach's essay reveal the type's tendency to stray into allegory; abuse of the type occurs in every phase of its progressive revelation. Typological interpretation is precariously set against a series of rhetorical figures that constitute the type but also destroy its claim to proper meaning. The type must, by definition, constitute a resemblance between two distinct events; in this sense, it functions as a metaphor. At first, Auerbach suggests, "vague similarities" suffice to make *figura* recognizable. The "determination" to find likenesses increases the chances of error, or false connections between events that bear no essential connection with each other. Similarly, with Paul, *figura* comes dangerously close to allegory, since Paul emphasizes the principle of negation, the transformation of a historical event in the Old Testament into a mere shadow (see p. 51). Pauline negations make faith possible but at the price of destroying the substantive existence of the type; Paul gives us the shadow rather than the substance. Auerbach himself finally decides to rest the true definition of type upon the trope of synecdoche: earthly events within a typological scheme are not self-sufficient, nor are they links in a chain of development; a *figura* or type is "part of a wholly divine reality enacted in the future" but at present only imperfectly knowable. Again, however, abuses are very likely, for we can never be sure that any part belongs to the divine whole except in retrospect. Throughout Auerbach's essay the definition of the type is intertwined with a rhetoric of tropes. The priority of type over trope is by no means assured; or, as Auerbach puts it, the semantic development of "type" reveals how a "word may grow into a historical situation." Since the type is by definition historical and substantive this

statement comes as a surprise. Does history precede semantic usage, as we normally suppose? or is it often the case that history is governed by complex words like “type?”

Ruskin’s essay on the Lamp of Sacrifice, from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), presents a condensed version of the problems raised by Auerbach’s discussion; in fact, Ruskin’s essay is exemplary. It begins with an extremely orthodox definition of Christian typology that repeats, practically verbatim, principles drilled into the young Ruskin every Sunday by the Reverend Henry Melvill— one of the most important exponents of Victorian typology, according to George Landow.⁵ The essay ends, however, with a call for human sacrifice that is not “typical in meaning,” that in no way refers to the Levitical laws or the sacrifice of Christ. Sacrifice becomes an aesthetic principle. It verges uncomfortably close to the very antithesis of the type, the idol. Sacrifice, the arch or master type, becomes the point of intersection of material worth and aesthetic disinterestedness, church ornamentation and heathen worship, self-abnegation and sensual pleasure. Such crossings of opposites are characteristic of highly figurative or tropological texts. We would not expect such crossings in an orthodox statement of the doctrine of typology. Has Ruskin abused the doctrine of types? Or does his text reveal abuses inherent in the type itself? Landow suggests that “type” in this context is merely “rhetorical.”⁶ Ruskin resorts to the authoritative terminology of types to prop up his preference for the Gothic Revival style. But perhaps his text is rhetorical in a more troubling sense. Perhaps no type can evade tropological deflection. It is possible that Landow needs to be disabused of his tendency to normalize the concept of the type, for his own discussions of typology in post-Ruskinian writers such as Rossetti or Hopkins display a remarkable tolerance for the sensualism and aesthetic splendour Ruskin terms idolatry.

Only a close reading of Ruskin’s text can answer such questions, for use and abuse cannot be dissociated. We cannot determine their difference by invoking empirical referents or ontological truths “outside” the text. Typology demonstrates this dilemma perfectly, because, as Auerbach suggests, it makes all events, historical or extra-temporal, into *texts* that need to be deciphered. I turn therefore to Ruskin’s text on the type of sacrifice in architecture.

Ruskin introduces typology into his discussion of the propriety of church decoration in answer to the question: “Can the Deity be indeed honoured by the presentation to Him of any material objects of value, or by any direction of zeal or wisdom which is not immediately beneficial to man?” The question is extremely subtle, for it assumes a concept of “bare and mere costliness— the substance and labour and

time themselves," independent of the result, the building. Material and human costs must be totally devalued, must be taken completely out of the context of human political economy, before they can become sacrifices. The human faculties of feeling, conscience and reason contaminate true sacrifice with an element of self-interest. Self-interested sacrifices are contradictory or imperfect, Ruskin argues. Labour, time and substance are all that we have to offer God, but as an offering they must be purified; they must be offered in and of themselves. The translation of substance and labour into sacrifice is made possible, for Ruskin, through the doctrine of typology. The first question may be answered in terms of a second: "whether the Bible be indeed one book or two, and whether the character of God revealed in the Old Testament be other than His character revealed in the New." Typology provides the "most secure truth." God's laws, particularly of sacrifice, may change in any "given period of man's history," but God's character never changes. "Type," as Ruskin uses it here, refers to "Divine character"—an atemporal property of God Himself.

Human labour and substance become properly sacrificial in their typical reflection of God. The typical character of sacrifice is made explicit in the Bible: in order for man to understand the scheme of Redemption, "that scheme should be shown from the beginning by the type of bloody sacrifice. But God had no more pleasure in such sacrifice in the time of Moses than he has now; He never accepted, as a propitiation for sin, any sacrifice but the single one in prospective: and that we may not entertain any shadow of doubt on the subject, the worthlessness of all other sacrifice than this is proclaimed at the very time when typical sacrifice was most imperatively demanded. God was a spirit, and could be worshipped only in spirit..."

The typical character of sacrifice in this passage is "spirit"; any sacrifice becomes in principle typical when it is divested of material worth, when it is made literally worthless. The type is defined, therefore, as an opposition of spirit to substance. Although Ruskin alludes to the "single" sacrifice of Christ "in perspective," the typological principle of foreshadowing is trivialized; it serves as a pun, a "shadow of a doubt" within the recognition of the true type. Ruskin is not concerned with the doctrinal point of establishing a perceivable likeness between the pure blood of the sacrificial lamb and Christ's—which would be the orthodox approach he takes in his notebooks on the Pentateuch. He avoids altogether the problem of proper resemblances and concentrates upon an idealizing argument. Metaphors of resemblance give way to an emphasis on the allegorical nature of sacrifice. Virtually anything may become a type of sacrifice according to Ruskin's definition. All substances and acts of devotion are reduced

to a single allegorical stratum of perfectly interchangeable parts. As in any allegory, the specific realization of the concept is unimportant as far as the concept itself is concerned. This definition of typical sacrifice is potentially too successful and hence uncritical. While it does away with the interferences of the human self, it also seems to do away with the entire principle of costliness that was the premise of the argument. God gave Christ freely, but this absolute sacrifice renders all other sacrifices *useless*. No preceding or subsequent sacrifice bears any proper relation to the sacrifice of Christ except as a futile imitation: "the worthlessness of all other sacrifice than this is proclaimed at the very time when typical sacrifice was most imperatively demanded." There is surprisingly little tension in this paradoxical injunction. It suggests none of the "resistance" that I theoretically attribute to a proper abuse of a critical term. Unlike Auerbach's type, or the Hegelian *Aufhebung*, Ruskin's type cancels without preserving. Landow correctly points out that Ruskin's type of sacrifice never needs to be "fulfilled." In Ruskin's words, the type of sacrifice does not "image Christ, nor fulfil the purposes of sacrifice" in any material way.

Where, then, does Ruskin's definition of type contradict itself? Ruskin's elimination of all phenomenal and substantive properties from the type makes possible the key term of his definition, which is not "spirit" but "useless." Types have no practical, indeed no utilitarian, value. What is thus achieved is the fundamental notion of aesthetic *disinterestedness*. The aesthetic play of the type is a threat that is disguised at this stage of Ruskin's argument. In the terminology of typology, it is a threat that is still on the "horizon" or in the "shadows." In referring the type directly to God's character and His pleasure, Ruskin leaves the specific meaning and concrete appearance of any type open, but he makes sure that the type cannot be interpreted or seen in pragmatic, socio-economic terms. The type, in effect, makes possible a doctrine of ornamentation, which is, after all, the ultimate goal of the essay on the Lamp of Sacrifice. Substance and labour as such would involve ornamentation in the issues of exchange-value, class relations (the servitude of the worker), and capital expenditures (since ornament is expensive). These issues corrupt not only theology but aesthetic appreciation. But as soon as Ruskin attempts to qualify the type aesthetically—in terms of the "necessary" versus the "non-essential," the purity of the beautiful versus the sensualism of the "idol" and so forth — "type" becomes a highly ambiguous and abusive term. Proper theological significance fails to support or even coincide with the terminology of appearance, form, colour and splendour. In rhetorical terms, the conceptual purity allegory makes

possible by devaluing the image is corrupted by the aesthetic possibilities of a metaphorical mode: images acquire independent significance by comparison with each other according to external resemblances. Aesthetic metaphors make possible the temporal, non-typological categories of repetition or difference; types become "typical" in the empirical sense of the term. The more Ruskin tries to use the term type as an aesthetic principle the more he needs to abuse it. This may be seen in the second phase of his argument.

The type of sacrifice is necessarily linked to idolatry in the story of Moses leading the Israelites through the wilderness. Unlike most Victorian commentators, Ruskin is not concerned with Moses as a type of Christ; rather, he notes that the Levitical laws of sacrifice are handed down during God's "hatred" of the Israelites' idolatry. The dictate to sacrifice is made at the very moment when the Israelite is most temptable, when he has just come out of the idolatrous land of Egypt. God may demand sacrifice at the same time that he empties it of value, but the demand for worship is more complex. Idolatry, unlike costliness, cannot be done away with to make room for a pure aesthetics of devotion, for idolatry and aesthetics share the same phenomenal realm. Against the "mortal danger" of idolatry "provision was not made in one way—by withdrawing from the worship of the Divine Being whatever could delight the sense, or shape the imagination, or limit the idea of Deity to place." The ornamentation of the Tabernacle may not be "necessary" to the worship of God, as Ruskin says, but this does not immediately distinguish it from idolatry. Both aesthetic splendour in the worship of God and idolatry rely upon what Ruskin calls "external signs"—a category that includes precious metals, skillful carvings and brilliant or sublime natural phenomena. Aesthetic splendours, such as the rainbow, or the brilliant colour of the hyssop, are proper "external signs" of devotion, or of the covenant, only insofar as they are typical of God. But how can they be typical when, under the laws of sacrifice, types have by definition no empirical value? Types of sacrifice demand that we ignore the empirical properties of the type, that we concentrate strictly on its meaning. Types of worship demand the opposite: aesthetic value as an "external sign" of worship increase, Ruskin says, when the sign is less typical in meaning (p. 36). Only one rainbow, for example, properly signifies the covenant and only the same rainbow foreshadows the new covenant of Grace through Christ. As a sign of worship, however, it is infinitely repeatable and comparable to human painting and other natural bands of colour. George Landow has noted, without objection, that Ruskin's extension of types makes possible an "elaborate analogy between

natural phenomena and theological fact.”⁷ This ought to lead us to ask: Do types make metaphors possible? or is it the other way around? Why should we tolerate Ruskin’s loose usage of the term “type” in the subsequent volumes of *Modern Painters* and in *The Stones of Venice*, works which are central to an understanding of Victorian aesthetics: The term “type” in these normative works has lost all traces of ambiguity. Landow and others often cite these works as evidence of the Victorian capacity to reconcile mimesis with spiritualism. This is to read Ruskin’s analogies and metaphors as if they were proper theological meanings. In these later works of Ruskin, extensive falsehoods claim to be true under the rubric of seemingly transparent critical terms, such as “type” or “symbol.” In the discussion of the rainbow in *Modern Painters* V, for example, Ruskin speaks of the rainbow’s typological meaning of “sanctification and redemption,” but he then goes on to a discussion of sunlight as a “type of the wisdom and righteousness of God.” Unlike the rainbow, sunlight in and of itself has no typical significance; Ruskin, as Landow notes, uses sunlight as a substitutive image for God, in other words as an allegory. Substitutions and analogies based on physical resemblance contaminate the text’s typological purity. Far from strengthening the recognition of types in nature, Ruskin’s easy metaphorical transitions from one natural phenomenon to another should alert us to the presence of a massive abuse of terminology. The occasional recognizable abuse, as in the text on the type of sacrifice, is not the anomaly in Ruskin’s aesthetic; it is the very tropological and figurative basis of his most normative claims as a Victorian theorist.

NOTES

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1. The Bloomian terms are taken from *The Anxiety of Influence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); for Derrida’s play upon *Qual* and *Quelle* see *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), pp. 273-306. Bloom’s definition of metalepsis may be found in *A Map of Misreading* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), p. 102.
2. For the Pauline and classical definitions of the type see Erich Auerbach, “Figura” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (1959; rpt. Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1973), pp. 11-76. The hermeneutics of the type is discussed by E. D. Hirsch, *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 265-274. On the type and nineteenth century realism see Peter Demetz, “Balzac and the Zoologists: A Concept of the Type,” in *The Disciplines of Criticism*, ed. Peter Demetz, Thomas Greene and Lowry Nelson, Jr. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), pp. 397-418.

3. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows: Biblical Typology in Victorian Literature, Art and Thought* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), p. 3.
4. Ruskin's essay on the type of sacrifice, in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, may be found in *The Complete Works of John Ruskin. Library Edition*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London: George Allen, 1903), VIII, 27-53; see especially pp. 31-37. Landow first discussed this text in *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), pp. 339-349.
5. Landow's point is supported by Van Akin Burd, "Ruskin's Testament of his Boyhood Faith; *Sermons on the Pentateuch*" in *New Approaches to Ruskin: Thirteen Essays*, ed. Robert Hewison (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), pp. 1-16. Some of the passages from Ruskin's youthful sermons seem to be echoed, almost verbatim, in Ruskin's essay on sacrifice.
6. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, p. 114.
7. *Victorian Types, Victorian Shadows*, pp. 113. Landow cites two texts on the rainbow as evidence of Ruskin's elaborate analogizing: one from *The Stones of Venice* II (10. 174-75) and one from *Modern Painters* V (7. 418).