



Exzerpt: R. Wuthnow (1988). Religious Discourse as Public Rhetoric

In this review essay Wuthnow uses two texts as complementary tools to show how religious public discourse can be structurally analysed.

Northrop Frye: centripetal and centrifugal forces

The main modes of analysis in Frye's »The Great Code: The Bible and Literature« (1982) is focused on literary elements such as language, myth, metaphor, typology, imagery, narrative and rhetoric. Frye distinguishes between *centripetal* aspects, where the »primary« or »literal« meaning of the text in question is revealed, where the text is presented as a closed, interlinked system - »a system that reinforces itself«. The *centrifugal* aspects refer to connotations and layers of interpretation that »spin of« from a text. Metaphors are often used as they open up multiple layers of meaning, that open up the text to larger interpretations - but at the same time, metaphor can set in motion a centripetal force which closes down, restrict the interpretation. The relation among words determine what they signify, and in religious texts this often are dual, opposing tendencies are used to either open up (centrifugal) or narrow down (centripetal) interpretation. These polar orientations are found in religious texts - likewise these polar orientations are found in interpretation and thus in religious discourse.

Susan Rubin Suleiman: redundancy, exemplary narratives and apprentices

In her »Authoritarian Fictions: The Ideological Novel as a Literary Genre« (1983) Suleiman describes how texts restrict possible interpretations to particular ideological positions - how they »aim for a single meaning and for total closure«. The use of redundancy is most important to reinforce a single way of understanding. Suleiman shows that not only quantitative redundancy is important, but a more in-depth and qualitative perspective is needed to find the redundancies of ideas and themes. The »principal constituents« of any narrative text have to be described: a) on the story layer: characters, contexts and events and b) on the discourse level: narration, focalization and temporal organization. Redundancy should be seen as possible permutations of circumstances and

can be found on any layer - or category (e.g. narrations, characters, events, sequences) - interlinked with each other.

Exemplary narratives are used to establish identification / a relationship between the sender and receiver within the text and the actual reader which includes the reader and thus direct his interpretation. Apprenticeship storys establish a virtual identification through the use of some mentor who guide the reader through contrasts and hurdles and to make explicit the lessons learned.