

In this dissertation I investigate how the motif of religion in a representative selection of novels by Olav Duun expresses and illustrates particular aspects of the author's depiction of the human being. *På Lyngsøya* (1917), *Juvikfolke I–VI* (1918–23), *Medmenneske-trilogien* (1929–33), *Samtid* (1936) and *Menneske og maktene* (1938) constitute the corpus of my study.

Traditionally, Duun's works have been interpreted either positively, as an expression of a coherent universe of values rooted in human responsibility and altruism, or critically, as puncturing such values by revealing underlying destructive tensions in society as well as in the human mind. Inspired by the hermeneutic reflections of Paul Ricoeur, I argue for an interpretation of the texts as marked by an open-ended dynamic intention, challenging readers to appropriate in their reading and in their lives, the potential hope-oriented course of action indicated in the texts.

I present a thorough survey of the religious traditions Duun was exposed to – the low church pietist movement in the local community where he grew up; the more open-minded, liberal religious attitude inspired by the Danish theologian Nikolai Grundtvig that he was introduced to at the teachers' training college; and the impulses he received from his reading of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, William James and Henri Bergson. In these traditions we can clearly discern between static and dynamic tendencies.

The first part of the dissertation is a chronological reading of each of the novels, showing how the characters are depicted in a tension between a static and a dynamic attitude to life. In *På Lyngsøya* this is demonstrated in the mental and religious traumas of a lay preacher; in *Juvikfolke*, it is unfolded in a broad historical novel outlining the material and psychological development of a family through several generations; *Medmenneske-trilogien* shows the struggle in a dramatic family setting, with both generational and intermarital tensions; *Samtid* presents how the devastating controversies in a small rural community are mirrored in a young man's struggle to come to terms with both himself and God; in *Menneske og maktene*, ravaging outer and inner storms threaten the existence of individual characters and an entire small island community. A pivotal issue raised in all the novels is the problem of evil with a view to both religious and ethical perspectives. All the texts are permeated by a dynamic intention that does not postulate fixed opinions or positions, but points to possible ways of reflection and action in human beings' search for meaning. The literary universe is thus not closed and leaves room for hope.

The second part of the dissertation first gives an outline of biblical intertextuality as evident in the typological hermeneutic tradition, which sees Old Testament events and characters as types fulfilled in their New Testament antitypes or counterparts (e.g. Christ as the new Adam). This hermeneutic mode was first applied in literary studies by Erich Auerbach who refers to it as figural interpretation. I trace the development of the use of this technique as applied by authors postfiguring characters and events in their works on biblical patterns, referring to studies by scholars such as Northrop Frye, Tibor Fabiny, Svend Bjerg and Erik A Nielsen. I apply this technique to Duun's works, focusing on his use of the following biblical motifs: the chosen; sacrifice; Christ; resurrection; and eschatology. The introductory part of each chapter outlines the biblical background of the motif in question and a brief sketch of its use in various literary traditions. Duun's transformation of biblical motifs in his fiction indicates a movement from something unfulfilled that yearns for fulfillment. This confirms and illustrates the dynamic vision of the human being which the thematic-oriented first part of the dissertation demonstrates.

