

THE MELODRAMA OF POSSESSIVE AGENCY

Ragnild Lome

ABSTRACT:

In the last decades, streams within posthumanism and new materialism, have turned their attention to the phenomenon of *agency*. And they have done so in ways which open the phenomenon for social and cultural historical investigations, relevant for cultural studies and literary studies alike. This article uses a concrete case—the melodramatic novel *Koloss* by Norwegian author Finn Alnæs—in order to speculate on how a literary form can be seen to co-evolve—or in this case, clash—with fluctuations in the cultural history of agency. In the 1960s—the heydays of cybernetics—a discrepancy can be observed, between the nourishment of individualism in politics and advertisement, and the distribution of individual agency in the new emerging technologies of cybernetics, which pushed agency as a question in the forefront of a series of novels, *Koloss* included. However, the novel’s discussion of agency was ignored by the critics, as well as in the scholarly literature to follow. In an effort to get closer to the co-development of ideas of agency and aesthetic form, the article asks why this has been the case. Did the melodramatic form of the novel stand in the way of its aesthetic reflection on agency? And could the novel and its reception therefore be seen as an example of the existence of complex feedback-loops, between ideas of agency in a given culture and aesthetic form?

KEYWORDS:

Agency, melodrama, Finn Alnæs, *Koloss*, Mark Seltzer, melodrama of uncertain agency

In an interview with Mikkel Bolt and Devika Sharma in *K & K* (2016), American philosopher and affect theorist Sianne Ngai identifies a need to talk in a more nuanced way about agency. What, in our contemporary moment, counts as agency and who counts as agents?¹ In this article, I propose a way to see agency as a historical contingent phenomenon, which is closely interlinked with aesthetic form. Accordingly, aesthetic history becomes a fruitful source to draw upon, when wanting to nuance ideas of what agency is, and who counts as agents.

This historical approach to agency is demonstrated and discussed in a reading of the Norwegian novel *Koloss* (1963) by Finn Alnæs. Written in a melodramatic form, *Koloss* was an odd-ball in the Norwegian 1960s; a period where theatrical melodrama was considered rather passé, and the young Norwegian authors were inspired by modernist poetics and the French nouveau-roman-movement. The reception of the book was both overwhelming and polarized; conservative critics praised it as a defense of individualism and liberal values, and progressive critics condemned it for too obviously arguing for a materialist understanding of man. Reading *Koloss* today, it seems obvious that the novel most of all questioned agency itself, and used a melodramatic form in order to push the question of agency to the forefront of the novel. Why did this seemingly evident discussion of agency elude the reception of the novel? A speculative answer is given in this article, based on American literary scholar Mark Seltzer's argument, about the melodrama as a form which gained popularity in historical periods such as the industrial age, where technology simultaneously enhanced and annihilated individual agency, but has less to offer the systemic and cybernetic 20th century, where agency is understood as distributed on several actors. Following Seltzer's line of thought, and based on a survey of the book's critical reception in 1963, I will suggest that the melodramatic form of *Koloss* was considered *irrelevant* to the 1960s literary public, and that the discussion of agency disappeared along with the lack of awareness towards this form.

However, before I can elaborate upon the novel and its reception, a theory of the relationship between aesthetics and agency is required. Also, a definition of the melodrama is needed, followed by a perspective on how to conceptualize transformations in ideas of agency from the 19th to the 20th century, namely, as a transformation from a possessive idea of agency to an idea of agency as ecological or environmental.²

BACKGROUND: LITERATURE AND AGENCY

The relation between agency and aesthetics has a long history. For the German philosopher G. W. F. Hegel, theater was the essential and most prominent genre of literature for many reasons—one being that he conceived of the development of theatrical practices as closely connected to the development of ideas of agency. Hegel stresses that the theater was invented in Ancient Greece when an individual actor entered the stage, acting out parts of a story that

until this point had been told exclusively by a chorus. An agent singularized on stage, separated from the collective, observed by an audience, and performing actions written for him by someone else, constitutes a triangular construction which makes it possible to separate deeds from mere events and give an event the shape of an action. Thus, agency is at the same time a social construct and an aesthetic construct, and the stage becomes a place for the contemplation of agency.³ Or to broaden it, for our purpose: Aesthetics is fundamentally interlinked with the history of agency, and literary history therefore becomes a fruitful source to go to when discussing agency.

Not surprisingly, both literary scholars and philosophers have turned to literature in order to contemplate agency. From a point of departure similar to Hegel's, the German literary theoretician Joseph Vogl discusses in his book *Über das Zaudern* (2008) the phenomenon of "doubt" in the western literary canon, and shows how literary representations of doubt help reveal the contingency of actions.⁴ American posthuman thinkers such as N. Katherine Hayles and philosopher Jane Bennett has also turned to literary history, in order to explore the ramifications of what they call distributed ideas of agency, demonstrating the vast potential for rethinking agency, which lies in literary works.⁵

THE MODERN MELODRAMA

In his book *Bodies and Machines* (1991) Seltzer suggests considering the melodrama as a *modern* aesthetic form suitable for aesthetic reflection upon the emerging uncertainty about agency in the industrial age. By identifying a returning conflict in many American 19th century naturalist novels, between an enhancement of individual agency and an annihilation of the same, he introduces the analytical concept *melodrama of uncertain agency*; an aesthetic structure which at the same time portrays agency as something which is nascent in the individual, and a force coming from outside of the individual. Seltzer does not use the term "possessive," but for the purpose of this article I have found it helpful to adjust his terminology a little and when speaking of the melodrama, I am referring to a *melodrama of possessive agency*. It is a literary form that facilitates agency as something the individual either has, or does not have. Agency is in this aesthetic form portrayed as uncertain, according to Seltzer, always an oscillation between having and not having.⁶

Due to its binary logic, the melodrama is suitable for portraying agency in this way. Its bad reputation in critical theory

aside, the aesthetic reflection of the melodrama is constructed around a logic of the excluded middle, which makes it a genre, not of ambiguity, but of contradictions and ideological conflict, as drama theorist Peter Brooks argues.⁷ Further, the crux of melodrama is its ability to dramatize ideological conflict, as suggested by Laura Mulvey in “Notes on Sirk and Melodrama”: “Ideological contradiction is actually the overt mainspring and specific content of melodrama, not a hidden, unconscious thread to be picked up only by special critical processes.”⁸

ECOLOGIZATION OF AGENCY

Seltzer connects a melodramatic uncertain agency to the mechanical age and argues that melodrama as a literary form is less suited to reflect upon agency in the 21st century. What characterizes the narrative structures of the information age, Seltzer argues, are *undramatic* narrative plots, which are better suited to placing agency, not in individuals and machines, but on a systemic level, representing what I will refer to as ecological or environmental ideas of agency. That is, agency is no longer *uncertain* in the information age, Seltzer argues, but systemic, and therefore, it is neither possessive, nor non-possessive.⁹

Since the Second World War, an idea of agency as distributed and processual has become dominant—a process many recent thinkers, for example German media philosopher Erich Hörl, has described as part of a paradigmatic shift toward what he calls a general ecologization of thought in the latter half of the 20th century.¹⁰ Such an idea of agency is articulated in the cultural history of cybernetics in the early information age, as well as in the open and explicit discussions of agency in sociology, philosophy, and political theory in the postwar years. The French philosopher Gilbert Simondon was one of the first to identify in the early information age a radical environmental change, which affects ideas of agency, and requires, Simondon writes in his seminal work *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (1958), that even a child in this epoch ought to know “what self-regulation is.”¹¹ The human is no longer “the supervisor of a squad of slaves”. Rather, man “is the permanent organizer of a society of technical objects which need him as much as musicians in an orchestra need a conductor.”¹²

This rethinking of agency has been elaborated further by currents within the social sciences and the arts in recent decades, such as STS-studies, posthuman theory and new materialism, whose contemplation of agency can be considered as symptoms

of exactly this rupture in the cultural understanding of agency in the latter half of the 20th century. Despite the many different takes on the concept of agency in these different theoretical traditions, what they have in common is an understanding of agency as a *process* emerging out of a collective of both human and non-human agents, rather than as a quality which can or cannot be possessed.

EXAMPLE: FINN ALNÆS' KOLOSS

The acclaimed novel *Koloss* (1963) by the young Norwegian author Finn Alnæs and its reception in Norway in the early 1960s, is a peculiar case in Norwegian literary history. The novel—which was Alnæs' debut—was submitted to a Nordic novel writing contest, where it received the Norwegian prize in 1963.¹³ Although it did not take the Scandinavian main prize, this meant that the novel had been highly awarded before it had been released and publicly reviewed. The reception it eventually received was polarized, and in the following, I will suggest considering this as the result of a clash between a wish to aesthetically reflect upon agency from the authors side, and the use of a literary form that countered the very same ambition, causing the ambitious exploration of agency to collapse.¹⁴

Koloss is narrated in the first person and follows the rise and fall of a very sensitive, but vital and strong-minded young man, Brage Bragesson, born and raised in the mountain chains of Rondane in Norway. As a young man, genuinely in love with his girlfriend Siv but puzzled by his sadistic urges toward her, Brage decides to board a ship, headed to Amsterdam. Coincidentally, he boards together with his childhood frenemy, Bentstein. In the red-light district in the Dutch capital, the two of them end up in a fight with a group of German sailors, and Brage—being the vital young man he is—is unable to stop himself and kills one of the Germans. During the trial, agency becomes for the first time an explicit theme in the novel, particularly in discussions between Brage and his hard-working defender, Stefan Borovic, a Jewish-Dutch Holocaust survivor and behaviorist who believes no one is genuinely guilty or responsible for their actions—everyone is a patient, rather than an agent. The trial wraps up the first half of the novel.

Four years later Brage is released, and he goes back to Norway to find Siv because she has gone missing in the mountains. Both

Brage and Bentstein, who is a good friend of Siv's brother, are searching for her in the mountains when Bentstein—who is a diabetic—has an accident and loses his insulin supplies. Brage goes on an audacious rescue mission that only a Fridtjof Nansen or a Roald Amundsen would be able to pull off—spanning 200 pages in the novel—in order to save the life of his rival. Afterwards, he is praised as a hero—and celebrated as the half-god he had initially presented himself as in the beginning of the novel. However, when he soon after finds Siv, dead and frozen in a waterfall in the mountains, his reaction makes both the reader and everyone around Brage realize that this heroic figure is in fact raving mad. Brage insists on bringing the corpse to his cabin, where he holds a wedding, and is shortly after admitted to a psychiatric ward. Stefan Borovic narrates the last pages of the novel. “The eyes of Brage left me with no doubt that he was insane.”¹⁵

Throughout the novel, the representation of Brage flickers between depicting him as a vital man and as a machine and it cannot reach a middle state where the individual has anything less than all-encompassing agency, or none at all. Thus, the discussion of agency is at the center of the novel from the beginning, in what could be regarded as a melodramatic oscillation between wilful, autonomous agency and determined agency. Brage starts off his story by claiming that he managed to overcome a physical paralysis as a child, simply “because I wanted to”¹⁶—an event which has become foundational for his identity. “I was always the one who overcame the paralysis.”¹⁷ He continues talking about himself as a colossus, a force of nature culminating in a single individual will. Even his first name alludes to this self-image, meaning literally “the best.” His autonomy and uniqueness are further emphasized by his surname Brage^{sson}, “Brage, the son of Brage,” insinuating that he is a closed system, which is not dependent on anyone else. This insistence on autonomy of the narrator, is contrasted by the way the other characters see him, as well as by the development of the plot itself. Plotwise, Brage ends up raving mad, seemingly confirming Borovic's view of him, and literally unable to finish his own story. Borovic, who is a behaviorist, constantly portrays him as a machine. Rather than controlling his own destiny, he is being determined by his upbringing and his environment. Symptomatic of the novel Brage often, comically, repeats to himself, that he has everything under control: “Everything is thought through. Bravo! Bravo! Continue like this.”¹⁸ And in the next moment he describes himself as a broken machine.¹⁹

The paratext of the novel encourages this melodramatic oscillation between two equally valid perspectives of agency: Brage as a stimuli-based machine and Brage as an individualist. The biblical title of the novel alludes to Brage as a colossus, who “walks on feet of clay.”²⁰ The cover of the first edition portrays a chess board cut in half, one straight and rational, the other undulating. The two novel’s epigraphs also point in two different directions at once. The first is a quote by Norwegian professor Johs. Andenæs that stresses the need to see the totality of the individual because the “human personality cannot be seen as fragmented qualities, but always makes up a unity.”²¹ The second is a quote from C. G. Jung, stressing the opposite view, namely, that no definition of the individual can be exhaustive.²²

The oscillation between ideologically opposing perspectives on agency can be connected to the novel’s theatrical and melodramatic aesthetics. Alnæs himself was particularly fond of the *theatricality* of arts. He underlines this in an article in the Norwegian literary magazine *Vinduet*, one year before the novel was published.²³ According to his biographer, Truls Gjefsen, Alnæs constantly altered between writing “plays or novels,” before writing *Koloss*,²⁴—a theatrical interest that makes sense when trying to contemplate the melodramatic oscillations of ideological ideas of agency in the book: Brage is *staged*, it seems, he is a *type* put on stage, wearing two different masks, which bring diametrical opposite ideas of agency into play.

Agency is also placed in the forefront of the novel in another way—a way which was more attuned to the ecologization of agency in the early information age. These two ways of seeing Brage—either as a stimuli-based machine determined by its environment, or as a free and autonomous being—correlates in the novel to the environments in which he acts. Brage has *one kind of agency* in the passive mountains of Norway, and *another one* in Amsterdam, insinuating that Brage’s agency and the environment in which he acts, cannot be strictly separated.²⁵ The mountain in Norway is as close as you can get to a passive environment in which the human body is the only active agent. In this environment, Brage has the possibility to be a hero. To fight, discipline, and overcome his own personal challenges, and test his own body. In short, he is in this environment enabled to perform the role of a masculine ideal of man: someone who is mastering his body and his environment. However, in the red-light district in the

metropole of Amsterdam, Brage becomes what Stefan Borovic argues that he is: a stimuli-based machine, triggered by his early childhood memories and surrounding temptations. He is a simple machine being controlled by his urges. It is here that Brage ends up killing a man. And when narrating these events from Amsterdam, the narrator uses for the first and only time in the novel alternative sources to narrate the story, which otherwise is based exclusively on Brage's memory. Brage is still the first-person narrator in this part, but logs, reports, and newspaper articles about the trial are used as supplements to support and contest his story.²⁶

CRITICAL RECEPTION

What did the critical reception say about this novel? What remains most striking about the novel's reception, is how polarized it was. The novel's reception ignored the theatrical staging of Brage's agency, and instead took sides: A large group of critics read the novel as an unmistakable "manifestation against materialism",²⁷ others read it as a manifesto *for* materialism.²⁸ The novel is on the one hand praised for proclaiming an individualism, where agency is possessed, and on the other hand, seen as expressing a machinic understanding of agency. Either way, the melodramatic form is considered out of order in the eyes of the critics and scholars; incapable of aesthetically reflecting different ideological positions. This ignorance of the melodramatic form was even actively rejected by some critics—the Danish critic Ole Brandstrup explicitly addressed its lack of form, stressing the novel's "contempt for reasonable proportions."²⁹ In his biography about Alnæs, *Finn Alnæs: Titan og Sisofys* (1995), Truls Gjefsen describes how frustrated the reception made Alnæs in 1963, and how misunderstood he felt.³⁰

However, the scholarly literature on the novel—including Gjefsen's account—holds that Brage *is* in fact the tragic figure he claims to be. Gjefsen reads the novel *Koloss* as a celebration of individualism and a contrast to "the lazy 'social democratic' man of the masses" which he relates to the 1960s in Scandinavia.³¹ He maintains that Brage is "a whole human, for good or bad, an individual proving that there are alternatives to being a man of the masses."³² A multifaceted perspective on Alnæs' book is offered by Norwegian literary historian and critic Øystein Rottem, yet he does not delve into the novel as a discussion of agency, but rather reads it as a symptom of the crisis of masculinity in an increasingly "feminized" consumer culture and welfare state in

the 1960s.³³ Rottem does indeed connect the passive environment of the Norwegian mountains to the reflection of masculinity in the novel, but without attributing this correlation of agency and environment to the novel itself. The view of nature is a symptom of the kind of masculinity which the novel proclaims, Rottem argues. Nature, he claims, is “first and foremost (...) a challenge, which shall be overcome, and when it is challenged, can be used as a tool to refine the very nature of man.”³⁴

My point in stressing this disregard of form, both in the critical and scholarly reception of the novel, is not to point out discrepancies in previous readings. Rather, it is to speculate on what could lie behind the unwillingness of the contemporary audience to pick up the questioning of agency in the novel, and to reflect further upon that. Why did all the critics feel a need to take sides, either on the individualist or the materialist side of the novel’s ideological discussion of agency, instead of delving into the questioning of agency itself? And why did no one comment upon the environmental approach to agency, which is so present in the novel?³⁵

What I am trying to get at, is that maybe the novel and its reception could be used as an example of the many complex feedback-loops between aesthetic form and ideas of agency. In accordance with Seltzer’s aforementioned argument, a possessive melodrama like the one in *Koloss*, might be incapable of discussing and reflecting upon contemporary problems of agency in the early information age—the heydays of cybernetics and systems theory. The legacy of this form was that of a more traditional, possessive understanding of agency, which appeared inadequate when dealing with the general ecologization of thought in this epoch. Instead of questioning different ideological ideas of agency, the novel in this way staged a drama that was picked up by its contemporary readers as an encouragement to argue either for or against.

Of course, literary forms change all the time, for many different reasons, not only—as I have suggested in this article—because dominant ideas of agency change in a culture. *Old* literary forms are picked up in some periods, and neglected and forgotten in others, and literary history is best understood as atemporal, following its own logic, only loosely related to more historical general developments.³⁶ But exactly for this reason, it makes sense to ask why certain forms are considered cutting edge in some periods, and appear oddly irrelevant in others. The case of *Koloss* might be a starting point of such a discussion, on

how changes in literary form can be connected to changing ideas of agency. What I have been considering, is whether the novel *Koloss* is best conceived as an example of a clash between, on the one hand, an intention to openly question agency, and, on the other, an aesthetic form, which to the public eye limited the very idea of agency to something inevitably located in the individual agent.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have used the melodrama to open a discussion of the relation between aesthetic form and the cultural history of agency. Finn Alnæs' hyperbolic novel *Koloss* stages both individualistic, deterministic and environmental ideas of agency in a melodramatic form, and therefore openly dramatizes an ideological conflict between a conception of agency as possessed by a vital human being, and an idea of the human being as a deterministic machine having no agency at all. But this staging of different ideological positions of agency received no resonance in the critical public. Despite its pervasive discussion of agency, contemporary criticism read the novel as a monologic narrative, paying no interest neither to the melodramatic form, nor to its consequences for the aesthetic reflection on agency. I have suggested conceiving this double disregard—both to the novel's form and its explicit discussion of agency—as a symptom of an ecological transformation in the idea of agency unfolding in postwar culture, which co-evolved with subtle changes in aesthetic forms, that made the melodrama appear to the critics as a form that was irrelevant to aesthetic reflections upon agency.

- 1 Mikkel Bolt and Devika Sharma, "Critique's Persistence: An Interview with Sianne Ngai," *Politics Letters*, February 27, 2017, <http://quarterly.politicsslashletters.org/critiques-persistence/>. Originally published as "Kritikkens fortsættelse – Interview med Sianne Ngai", *Kultur og klasse* 44 (2016), 7.
- 2 The thoughts on ecologization of agency in the 1960s prose fiction in this article are initially developed – and elaborated in further depth – in my forthcoming doctoral dissertation on the ecologization of agency in Scandinavian 1960s prose fiction, *Agency in a posthuman theatre* (forthcoming, LiU press, 2022). In the dissertation I do not consider the example of *Koloss*, but a similar conception of the melodrama is applied on other material.
- 3 These ideas can be found in the third part of the lectures on aesthetics (Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, (Suhrkamp, 1986) as well as in *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Suhrkamp, 1970). See also Allain Speight, *Hegel, Literature and the Problem of Agency* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).
- 4 Joseph Vogl, *Über das Zaudern* (Zürich: Diaphanes, 2008), 145.
- 5 See for example: *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999) by Katherine Hayles and *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008) by Jane Bennett.
- 6 For further elaboration, see, Lome *Agency in a posthuman theatre* (forthcoming).
- 7 Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996), 20.
- 8 Laura Mulvey, "Notes on Sirk and Melodrama," *Visual and Other Pleasures* (1989), 39.
- 9 See also the concept of "ecodrama" in Lome, *Agency in a posthuman theatre*, (forthcoming).
- 10 Hörl, Erich, "Introduction", *General Ecology: The New Ecological Paradigm* (Bloomsbury Publishing: 2017).
- 11 Simondon, Gilbert, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, translated by Cecile Malaspina and John Rogove (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 19.
- 12 Simondon, 2017, 21.
- 13 The competition was called "The Great Nordic Novel Competition" and organized in 1963 by the major publishers in the three Scandinavian countries (Gyldendal in Norway and Denmark, as well as Bonniers in Sweden). It is not to be confused with the yearly prize awarded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.
- 14 Of course, historical events never have just *one* explanation. The point here is not to provide a complete explanation of the reception of *Koloss*, but to use the case to highlight what I see as an example of the interlinking of aesthetic form and historical ideas of agency.
- 15 Alnæs, Finn, *Koloss*, (Oslo: Gyldendal, 1963), 536. Norwegian original: "Brages øyne levnet meg ikke en eneste tvil om at han var blitt sinn syk (...)."
- 16 Alnæs, *Koloss*, 23. Norwegian original: "fordi jeg ville det."
- 17 Alnæs, *Koloss*, 26. Norwegian original: "For jeg var alltid den som hadde overmannet lammelsen."
- 18 Alnæs, *Koloss*, 390. Norwegian original: "Alt vel gjennomtenkt. Bravo, Brage! Forsett slikt!"
- 19 Brage describes himself in the snowstorm in the last part of the book as a "broken machine, limping automatically." This idea of a being that is automatically limping, is probably a reference to the Norwegian philosopher Peter Wessel Zapffe and his magnum opus *Om det tragiske* (1941). Alnæs read Zapffe in the late 1950s and returns to his works later in his oeuvre. Most likely, his interest in the environment and its relation to the individual, can be traced back to his reading of Zapffe. Norwegian original: "ødelagt maskin, haltende automatisk." (Alnæs, *Koloss*, 454).
- 20 This is referred to literally in several passages, for example toward the end of the novel: "But I walked on clay." (Alnæs, *Koloss*, 500) Norwegian original: "Men jeg gikk som på lerfotter."
- 21 Alnæs, *Koloss*, 5. Norwegian original: "menneskelige personlighet ikke består av løsevne egenskaper, men alltid utgjør en enhet."
- 22 Alnæs, *Koloss*, 5. The full quote from Jung, is as follows (in Norwegian): "Det er åndens fornemste oppgave å strebe utrettelig etter en stadig dypere erkjennelse av det sjelelige vesen, uten å kunne drømme om noen gang å uttømme det."
- 23 In a 1962 article in the Norwegian literary magazine *Vinduet* Alnæs presented a view of the theater based on the presence of bodies on stage, rather than a dramatization of words. (Alnæs, Finn, "Konturene av et nytt teater," *Vinduet*, vol. 16 (1962, 56-69).
- 24 Truls Gjefsen, *Finn Alnæs: Titan og Sisofys* (1995), 62. In this biography of Alnæs, Gjefsen gives extensive details on his theater background, including that Alnæs pursued a career as a playwright in his early years, attended theater schools in London, and worked at theaters in the Norwegian cities Oslo and Stavanger. Norwegian original: "Jeg skrev stadig enten på skuespill eller roman."
- 25 As mentioned in note 19, this environmental impulse of the novel was most likely something Alnæs picked up from Zapffe, who speaks of interest bearers rather than individuals in his biosophic magnum opus, a work Alnæs read in the late 1950s. He could also have picked it up from Jung (who is quoted in the book's epigraph), who considers individualism, not as an end in itself, but rather focuses on *individuation* as a process.
- 26 For example, Alnæs, *Koloss*, 63.
- 27 For example, Martin Nag in the newspaper *Friheten*. (Nag, Martin, "'Koloss' – en kunstnerisk kraftprestasjon," *Friheten*, November 5, 1963, 6 and 12). Nag states that Alnæs from time to time expresses a kind of relativism in the book, but ensures the reader that this does not dominate the book. Rather, the novel arouses hope in the reader, the critic argues.
- 28 One critics argued that Stefan Borovic was a "channel for Alnæs' view on crime and punishment." (J. S., in *Profil vol 22 nr 3*, (1964), 26). Norwegian original: "talerøyr for Alnæs sitt syn på brotsverk og straff".
- 29 Brandstrup, "Langrendsløberen, 4. Danish Original: "foragt for rimelige proportioner."
- 30 Gjefsen, *Finn Alnæs: Titan og Sisofys*, 105

-
- 31 Gjefsen, *Finn Alnæs: Titan og Sisofys*, 100. Norwegian original: "det dvaske, 'sosialdemokratiske' masse mennesket."
 - 32 Gjefsen, *Finn Alnæs: Titan og Sisofys*, 100. Norwegian original: "et *helt* menneske på godt og vondt, et individ som viser at det fins alternativer til å være masse menneske."
 - 33 In his essay "A spear in the sand" (1996), Rottem reads *Koloss* as a "masculine super-individualistic" reaction to the radical changes in gender relations in the postwar years. (Rottem, Øystein, "Et spyd i sanden. Maskuline utopier i Agnar Mykles *Sangen om den røde rubin* og Finn Alnæs *Koloss*," in *Lystlesninger – åtte essays om kjønn og identitet i norsk litteratur* (Oslo: Cappelen, 1996, 142.))
 - 34 Rottem, "Et spyd i sanden", 158. Norwegian original: Naturen "utgjør først og fremst en utfordring, noe som skal overvinnes, og idet den utfordres, kan den også tjene som et redskap til foredling av mannens egen 'natur'."
 - 35 A couple of years after *Koloss*, such a disregard of any connection to new and relevant ideas of agency in his writing would have made more sense. After a debate with the Norwegian author Axel Jensen in 1965, Alnæs got an image as a conservative thinker in the public (much to his frustration). His article "Romankunsten i Norge," where he arrogantly dismissed much of the new experimental literature in Scandinavia, which was considered important for the young generation of Norwegian writers, prompted Axel Jensen to respond in the following issue, in a harsh, well-articulated, entertaining, and patronizing article framing Alnæs as a reactionary. See also Gjefsen's "Art as an Ecosystem: in *Vagant* 2/3 1989, pp. 26-27 (Original Norwegian title: "Kulturen som økosystem".)
 - 36 For an elaboration of this discussion of the history of literary forms, see Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (1928). Here, Benjamin offers a historical non-linear view of aesthetic form, where forms are invented and thereafter apparently disappear before they suddenly reappear after centuries.