

Untangling the Knot – Words, Power, and Identity in Svend Åge Madsen

Nete Schmidt
University of Wisconsin

Abstract

Svend Åge Madsen (b. 1939) is one of the most important authors of modern Danish literature. This article discusses two of Madsen's novels – *Se Dagens Lys* (1980, *See the Light of Day*) and the more recent *Det Syvende Bånd* (2006, *The Seventh Bond*) – as exemplars of the problematics of most of Madsen's oeuvre: a search for the solid, foundational truth of individual existence in the context of the social collective. The article examines the structures of words, power, and identity in the two novels in the light of the ideas of four thinkers: R. D. Laing and his view of the ironies of existence; Michel Foucault's thoughts on power and the Panopticon; Søren Kierkegaard's thoughts about social existence; and Kristeva's theories of language and the subjective self. Words form the basis of the ludic battle for individual existence fought by the protagonists. Ultimately, the article argues, Madsen's literature functions in the tradition of timeless, great literature: to provide hope for a better life. Through a conscious assumption of one's responsibility as a human being, and through language as the redemptive means, the individual is able to create a, if not utopian, then at least dignified, content, and even happy existence, within a dystopian state framework meant to subordinate the individual into a homogeneous mass in the name of the greater good.

Keywords

Svend Åge Madsen; Julia Kristeva; Michel Foucault; R. D. Laing; dystopian literature.

Untangling the Knot – Words, Power, and Identity in Svend Åge Madsen

Nete Schmidt
University of Wisconsin

Introduction

The controversial psychiatrist R. D. Laing wrote his book *Knots* in 1970. In it he attempted to lay out patterns of human interaction: patterns which have not been classified but which are certainly, as he says, ‘strangely, familiar.’ (Laing 1970: 0) The quality of repetition, in his words ‘da capo sine fine’ (13) permeates the life experiences encapsulated in ‘knots, tangles, impasses ... binds’ (0) – many labels are appropriate – and create a skeletal web upon which humans climb in their quest to find meaning within themselves and within their connections to others. The knots in the web can be interpreted as hubs of power, which is either exposed in its naked authority, or dressed in various garbs disguising its true nature from the humanity climbing it.

His first ‘knot’ says:

They are playing a game. They are playing at not playing a game. If I show them I see they are, I shall break the rules and they will punish me. I must play their game, of not seeing I see the game. (1)

Breaking away from this vicious grid of a firmly super-imposed game-structure in order to find the solid, foundational truth of individual existence, alone and in social interaction, is the goal of the protagonists in the two novels by the Danish author Svend Åge Madsen which I will be discussing here. Surrounded as they are by authoritarian webs, the protagonists’ quest becomes a difficult re-definition and re-birth, pitching individual identity-formation versus the power-structure and concomitant identity-formation of the community. Svend Åge Madsen’s universe embraces no unambiguous happy endings, but, as I intend to show, his answers to the eternal and essential questions of the role of language,

reality, and fiction, provide hope for a better life, in the tradition of timeless, great literature. Through a conscious assumption of one's responsibility as a human being, and through language as the redemptive means, the individual is able to create a, if not utopian, then at least dignified, content, and even happy existence, within a dystopian state framework meant to subordinate the individual into a homogeneous mass in the name of the greater good.

Svend Åge Madsen, born 1939, is by many recognized as one of the most important authors of modern Danish literature,¹ and several of his works have been translated into other languages. His philosophical and humorous explorations of existence centre on literature as both a set of regulatory boundaries as well as a means to find ultimate possibilities in our search for the meaning of life. The two books discussed here may be labeled science fiction as they depict future societies. However, all the works of Svend Åge Madsen form a complicated network where the protagonist in one book may play a minor role in another. Themes and relationships keep expanding across the works, and the reader may feel like an explorer in a labyrinth with an infinite number of paths, shortcuts, and exits. As Karina Søby Madsen (2007) notes: 'Desuden spejler strukturen på finurlig vis det moderne samfunds netværkskarakter' (Moreover, in an ingenious and quirky fashion, this structure reflects the network-character of modern society). Madsen's preoccupation with mathematics is apparent in many of his novels, and the works chosen here are constructed with the precision of a mathematician drawing a chart of humans navigating through life. He is constantly walking the fine line between the realistic depictions of life centered in and around Århus, the second-largest city in Denmark, and a relativistic attitude professing that '[h]vad Verden og Mennesket er, afhænger af den synsvinkel, de ses under.' (What the World and Mankind are depends on the point of view from which they are perceived) (*Store danske encyclopædi*). Madsen's writing challenges the reader's perception of truth and reality, while demanding a presence and active engagement.

In the novels *Se Dagens Lys* (See the Light of Day) (1980) and *Det Syvende Bånd* (The Seventh Bond) (2006), Madsen explores the power-relationships between the individual body and the political social body of society, determining the individual's identity as predicated on that chosen for him / her by the political, social body. In fictional form, he is reflecting the ideas of Michel Foucault, who, in an interview in June 1975, was asked whether there is a fantasy body corresponding to different types of

1. See among others Mette Elsig Olsen in *Forfatternet*, *Den Store Danske Encyclopædi* (The Great Danish Encyclopedia), Nicolai Rerup Nielsen in *Litteratursiden*, and Anker Gemzøe

institution. Foucault answered: 'I believe the great fantasy is the idea of a social body constituted by the universality of wills...the phenomenon of the social body is the effect not of a consensus but of the materiality of power operating on the very bodies of individuals' (Foucault 1977: 55). Foucault goes on to discuss the paradox inherent in the individual's empowerment of his or her own body (through gymnastics, exercises, nudism etc.), which inevitably leads to body-political manifestations from the social powers (moral norms, anti-autoeroticism, anti-abortion), and finally states: 'In fact, nothing is more material, physical, corporal than the exercise of power' (57), thus refuting the belief that our capitalist, bourgeois societies have denied the reality of the body in favour of the soul, consciousness, and ideality. Indeed, the great fantasy in both the novels discussed in this article – the fantasy initially subscribed to and adopted by the protagonists – is the fantasy of a social body constituted by a universality of wills. As the plots develop, both protagonists start questioning the viability and desirability of this social body, ultimately rebelling against it and rejecting it in favour of a more separate, independent, but also somewhat alienated existence.

In his sophisticated essay on applied Hedonism, 'The Rotation Method' from *Either/Or* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard states 'one must also constantly vary himself, and this is the essential secret' (Bretall 1946: 31). This self-gratifying, constant variation is another basic, central theme explored in *See the Light of Day*, and it also forms the nuclear theme linked to the question of a crime-free society in *The Seventh Bond*. I shall return to this essay in more detail later.

In examining the structures of words, power, and identity in Svend Åge Madsen's two novels through the thoughts of R.D.Laing and his view of the ironies of existence, through Michel Foucault's thoughts on power and the Panopticon, through Søren Kierkegaard's thoughts about social existence, and through some of Kristeva's thoughts on language and the subjective self, I will show how Madsen's books provide a literary focal point and tools for an exploration of our humanity within a multi-faceted framework. Words form the basis of the battle for individual existence fought by the protagonists, and these societies, constructed as enormous games of Scrabble, establish a self-perpetuating system of control and power, prevent the citizens from establishing integrated senses of self-identity through linguistic competence, prevent the citizens from creating deeper meaning by becoming participants within inter-subjective relationships, and, therefore, propel the citizens into a painful, existential void. The juxtaposition of utopian and dystopian elements form a central knot in the web as the state-defined utopia becomes an individual prison-dystopia for the protagonists, which they must destroy in order to create a fulfilling individual existence.

The Body of Power and Knowledge

Madsen's universe pits the self versus the other(s) in the individual's quest for the highest life-quality, perhaps even happiness. The one becomes two in the inherent paradox of embracing one's alter ego in a strong communion – here with a person of the opposite sex – which produces sublime fulfillment, in a down-to-earth fashion, of the individual's quest. In order to succeed, the protagonists have to face ordeals, straddle obstacles, and evince superhuman perseverance on the path to reaching their goals of intransigent freedom from societal restraints. This freedom lives within the limitations of ethical humanity rather than democratic society, placing ethics above both politics and science. The individuals are stymied in their battle by the simple fact that all hindrances are created by a benevolent power wishing nothing but the best for its citizens. Or, in Laing's words: 'All in all / Each man in all men / All men in each man / All being in each being / Each being in all being ... / No distinctions no mind to distinguish' (1970: 82).

However, what appears to be a Sufi-like philanthropy is exposed in Madsen's novels as a mental oppression and uniformity. The power is based on a deep recognition of the nature of the human soul and is therefore ubiquitous and easily embraced by the subjects. Nothing is more appealing to ordinary members of society than becoming an integral part of the bigger humanity represented by the state, which in a circular motion is also its members. 'It was on the basis of power over the body that a physiological, organic knowledge of it became possible,' Foucault states (1977: 59), and he continues, 'Far from preventing knowledge, power produces it.' (59), and, finally, 'power isn't localized in the State apparatus and ... nothing in society will be changed if the mechanisms of power that function outside, below and alongside the State apparatuses, on a much more minute and everyday level, are not also changed' (60). In other words, power functions optimally when it is internalized by the objects subjected to the power and perceived as either a given, inflexible, and immovable condition or an insurmountable obstacle.

Power is intricately linked with knowledge, and the stratification and compartmentalization of available knowledge provide efficient tools for control and stability. Laing (1970: 56) portrays an image of unproblematic, because manipulative, knowledge-filtering from adult to child – or from state to citizen:

I feel you know what I am supposed to know
but you can't tell me what it is
Because you don't know that I don't know what it is
You may know what I don't know, but not

That I don't know it,
And I can't tell you. So you will have to tell me everything.

Combined with accessible knowledge, the mechanisms of power internalized in the individual body form stronger bonds of affection, gratitude, servitude, and purposefulness towards the state than any outward show of power could ever hope to accomplish. Therefore, the decisive movement away from the political body towards the individual body becomes a rebirth during which the individuals must redefine and reinvent their subjectivity and identity, in the process creating an entirely new universe and stability in the face of the perpetual change of the surrounding society. Feelings and emotions are constructed politically, but they can be reclaimed by the individual through a conscious effort. Autonomy, then, stresses the importance of self-determination and the knowledge that a life worth living includes relationships. Any deviation from the societal norms is labeled as madness-as-sickness, which must be cured immediately – both for the sake of the safety of society, but even more convincingly for the sake of the individual who would otherwise be lost. When Laing (1970: 5) writes

He does not think there is anything the matter with him because one of the things that is the matter with him is that he does not think there is anything the matter with him – therefore we have to help him realize that, the fact that he does not think there is anything the matter with him is one of the things that is the matter with him.

he poignantly illustrates the dual nature of ignorance-as-bliss and knowledge-as-power exemplified, respectively, by the citizens and the state.

See The Light of Day

Svend Åge Madsen's *Se Dagens Lys* – *See the Light of Day* – from 1980 depicts a future society based on the premise of happiness consisting of constant change and challenge. Every day, each individual wakes up next to a new person, is possibly handed a new child or children, has a new (important) position to fill, and a new group of friends to relax with at night. The evening pill ensures peaceful sleep while the citizens are transported on the belt to their new wake-up location. The purpose is to avoid conflicts sparked by boredom and class-distinction. All citizens must learn from each other and help each other grow. The protagonists, Elef and Maya, meet at random, but contrary to the state computer, Madam Data's plans, they form an attraction and desire to meet again. This is considered a disease, and they are wanted for re-socialization but escape and meet one of the engineers of the new society. She hands them the

task of living in the present while giving an account of the past. They live out their life together engaged in the monumental task of making sense of and finding meaning in ordinary human existence. Madsen's previously mentioned web of interrelated works is present here; the account written by Elef and Maya becomes one of Madsen's most monumental works, his popular breakthrough novel *Tugt og Utugt i Mellemtiden* (1976, Virtue and Vice in the Middle Time).² In the search for meaning, they also find their identity, and this identity is predicated on the words they use to describe it, a phenomenon authenticated by Allison Weir when she writes:

the problem of the *identity of the self* is bound up with the problem of the identity of meaning, and with the problems of the identifications with, or the relationship to, others ... a concept of the individual as a *participant* in the intersubjective constitution of *meaning* (1995: 267).

The protagonists seek depth rather than the broad experience, and they hope that their novel, in paper form, will help others grow and find a path to another form of humanity. Thus, Madsen juxtaposes the predictability of the state-controlled society with the individual's potential desire for serendipitous events, creating a basic conflict relative to a discussion of life-quality. This is reflected in Foucault's statement that: 'The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning ... The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.' (1988: 9).³ On one hand, Elef and Maya benefit from and embrace the novelty, growth, challenge, and constant renewal they find in their state-directed, seemingly random existence. They recognize the appeal in always becoming somebody else. However, on the other hand, they yearn for the knowledge and security inherent in stasis. Arguably, 'the human condition' may well be summed up in the words of Laing: 'I never get what I want / I never want what I get' (1970: 32), but Madsen's protagonists have advanced beyond this simplistic predicament. Sacrificing the certainty of the state-directed course of their existence, they choose to substitute it with uncertainty and unpredictability, assuming responsibility for their choices and embracing their right to be wrong. The duality in Weir's statement is expressed in their quest for togetherness spiced with separateness – the self and other in many combinations. Finally, their 'thoughtful and positive relation' (Foucault 1988: 12) to their own present prevents them from having futile and unproductive feelings of nostalgia. They live in the here and now in order to be able to produce a future.

2. See for example: *Danske Digtere i det 20. Århundrede* (Danish Authors in the 20th century) ed. Torben Brostrøm & Mette Winge, Gad 1980-82, volume 5 pp.170-72, and 4th edition ed. Anne-Marie May, volume 2 pp.414-415 about this book.

3. Oct. 25, 1982 interview, 'Truth, Power, Self'

Words and Self-Identity

Words, in the shape of brief 'Minder' (Memories), provide the reading material used for the mass education of all citizens, and in *Se Dagens Lys* the statement 'en dag som er værd at leve, er også værd at beskrive' (A day worth living is also worth describing) (9) sparks a novel urge in Elef to write down the events of his day in order to retain them in his personal memory. This act represents the beginning of Elef's awakening. In his society, the development of self-identity is supposedly only possible, as stated by Weir (1995: 267), 'through the development of a capacity for mutual understanding, within inter-subjective relationships. But this means that we have to be able to conceptually abstract from the relationships themselves to the inter-subjective *meanings* which mediate relationship'. Elef's world defines inter-subjective meaning as a string of pearls, day by day experiences, where only the present time counts. He declares, 'Jeg er ved at drukne i en verden uden datid' (I am drowning in a world without a past) (*Se Dagens Lys*: 63). Everything happens synchronously in an ever advancing movement where being with the same person twice would be perceived as unhealthy regression. Hence, there is no possibility of reaching meaning in a relationship since the inter-subjective framework is a foundationless abstraction that constantly flickers and changes.

Love is replaced by superficial, transient attraction, and is posited in subconscious (because suppressed) opposition to the consistent repetition of abjection disguised as generosity and growth. On the horizontal line of existence, the object and subject are disparate, and their connection is suspended. On the vertical line, there is no connection between the before and after. The individual is placed where the lines cross, and having no history, no future, no subject-identity, and no object-identity, he is highly malleable by society, in incessant flux, always changing, always new, and always looking for novelty – ironically, illustrating Kierkegaard's words: 'The extent of one's power to forget is the final measure of one's elasticity of spirit' (Bretall 1946: 27). In this society, elasticity is coveted and attractive as demonstrated by Elef's words when he is with Judith: '[hun] får mig til at indse at en improviseret dag...vil være mere charmerende...Hun tvinger mig til at vokse' ([she] makes me realize that an improvised day...will be more charming...She forces me to grow) (*Se Dagens lys*: 8).

Boredom, which Kierkegaard declares 'the root of all evil' (Bretall 1946: 24) would play the role of Devil's advocate in Madsen's society. Through boredom, the individual may find his or her creative powers rejuvenated or reborn and traversing the state-accepted behavior moulds, which would make him or her a challenge to the predictable and all-domineering state pattern. Therefore, it is important to keep all citizens happy at all

times and not bored – as they were in the past (Se *Dagens Lys*: 130). Hence, the means of control also become the means of bringing happiness to the citizens; an irresolvable paradox, it may seem, but one which complements Kierkegaard's hedonism.

The existential paradox extends to identity-formation through words. Elef says: 'Ofte før har jeg følt denne genstridighed mellem mine ord og mine oplevelser ... jeg er bundet til nogle forkerte ord' (I have often felt this obstreperousness between my words and my experiences ... I am tied to the wrong words) (Se *Dagens Lys*: 16). With a discrepancy between signifier and signified, there is no individual existence, only surface inter-subjectivity.

The development of self-identity takes place through the identification with the State as Mother, creating Kristeva's 'interaction of identity of meaning in language with affective relations with others, which underlies the realization of a self through a capacity for expression' (Weir 1995: 269). However, the primary conflict exists because as 'subjects-in-process' the protagonists 'develop and change through taking up positions, or identities, through an investment in a sociosymbolic order and thereby realizing and expressing their own heterogeneity' (275). Their heterogeneity is expressed through their recognition of the option of choice – choosing each other, identifying that 'kærlighed er gentagelse' (love is repetition) (Se *Dagens Lys*: 95). On the one hand, then, the subject constitutes itself through taking 'positions or identities within a social world and a symbolic order [language] ... by engaging in a world of shared or identical meanings, through which one can realize one's own meaning' (Weir 1995: 275) and develops its individual meaning through the expression or realization of its specificity in language while existing in a system of shared meanings and through interaction with others. On the other hand, the system excludes individual meaning and specificity and encompasses only the socially-prescribed inter-subjectivity. There is no room for individual expression except as expressed through the dictates for expression handed down by the state in the form of the 'Memories'. Therefore, the formation of the individual's own independent subjectivity is impossible until the individual breaks free from the bonds and finds his or her own expression through his or her own language.

Love and words as anti-abjection

The abjection portrayed through every communal action can only be counteracted by love, which, in *Se Dagens lys*, is seen as a negative within the social boundaries of accepted society since it prevents an individual from growth and variation. When Kierkegaard ironically comments that, '[o]ne must guard against friendship' (Bretall 1946: 28) and '[o]ne must

never enter into the relation of marriage' (29), based on the premise that friends and spouses will only be in the way of one's personal development, his statement, taken at surface value, is in total alignment with the philosophies of the society described in the novel. Without a trace of irony, the state encourages affection, warmth, joy, enjoyment, and improvisation as certain paths to growth, and is, actually, treating its citizens like plants. By constantly uprooting and moving a plant, one ensures that it never grows too tall or unwieldy, an apt metaphor for people in Madsen's society who are rotated and recycled and never grow too tall for the collective height of the community. In that sense, the society possesses ultimate control over every single detail of its citizens' lives. Even babies are part of the social chain from day one. Thus, a new mother gives up her own infant and has another infant to nurse the following day. The concept of motherhood becomes social interaction and expression, negating the individual feeling of love, which is perceived as stifling and growth-preventing. The failure to develop an integrated sense of self-identity is, thus, firmly linked to the maternal absence described among others by Kristeva as being detrimental to the formation of a nucleus of self. Kristeva writes in this respect that one 'get[s] the kit of representation but without the caboodle of drive. The caboodle remained in the emptiness of maternal fusion and/or maternal absence' (1986a: 266).

Social and linguistic norms are experienced in the novel as primarily repressive, and the way out of their predicament is for the protagonists to find new, untainted words, and new modes of developing linguistic competences. They have rejected the constant change, expansion, and growth and chosen stability, permanence, maybe even boredom – seen as a sickness and/or deviation by society – in order to develop a self-identity. Language for them comes to represent an alternative growth and change, an entry into the symbolic order without the abjection from their own core identity, but rather a separation from a mother-figure which was repressive. Elef says 'giv mig ord' (give me words) (23 and passim) repeatedly and thus creates himself through others, in the process negating himself, although he initially sees this as growth. However, when he finds his purpose, subscribing to Kierkegaard's statement that 'the more you limit yourself, the more fertile you become in invention' (Bretall 1946: 24), his words are his own. He finds the core which the state attempts to eradicate or, rather, fuse with all other cores to produce the state-core.

The happy state-sponsored Scrabble game creates forever-changing constellations with a forever-changing number of letters and players where one finds a spot on the board merely to be moved to another spot with points going up and down in a seemingly random fashion, and without ever being in the shape of the fully-formed words which yield the most points. In spite of the good intentions of society – happiness, contentment,

fulfillment – the individuals must tear themselves loose from the mother-state, although the void which is waiting, the independence turned abjection, is painful for the individual who resists the ultimate control of the state mechanism.

Individual words

The final piece in the puzzle is guilt and fear of punishment, which Madsen resolves by letting his protagonists take on the surrogate mother's role and find their own words to 'tell' themselves, to write a story, which is also history. Towards the end, Elef explains that the last 'Memory' says: 'Spejl dig i denne bog, finder du tomhed, må du begynde forfra' (See yourself reflected in this book: if you find emptiness, you will have to start over again) (Se *Dagens Lys*: 179). Ultimately, individuals have to create their own language and subjective and inter-subjective existence.

When Allison Weir writes that '[t]he struggle to make meaning through attempting to resolve apparent contradictions is essential to the ongoing constitution of self-identity...the development of self-identity is possible only through the development of a capacity for mutual understanding, within intersubjective relationships' (1995: 266-7), she expresses an essential struggle in Madsen's universe: the pivotal translation of meaning into an intimate, emotional, internalized expression in the shape of individualized language.

Through language choices, the protagonists – narrators on another level – create or re-create themselves and create a reality out of a world they have come to see as fictional. They put spokes in the wheel of time and choose a language of body and soul which encompasses the 'other' as a partner and collaborator in the monumental work of describing life, individual and individualized life, through human words. The bottom line is the movement away from the single individual towards an existence shared with a life partner, but stopping short before embracing the powerful collective consciousness of authoritarian society.

The Seventh Bond

Madsen's *Det Syvende Bånd – The Seventh Bond* – from 2006 advances further into futuristic visions. Challenging Foucault's statement that 'it would be...wrong to think that there is a political formula likely to resolve the questions of crime and put an end to it' (Foucault 1997: 2), Madsen has created a society where crime has been eradicated because every citizen has 'Øje' and 'Syn', an Eye and a View. The Eye keeps an eye on the individual

whereas the View is the individual's view of another individual in the society. Thus, one is constantly being monitored while constantly monitoring. Help-Services – as in his previous novel – are ready to interfere if somebody transgresses the minimal number of laws in this secure and supervised world. The purpose is twofold: to create well-behaved, decent human beings and to enlighten everyone to the variations and differences in humankind by allowing them time-limited glimpses into many different individual worlds. The monitoring is limited to twenty-three-day periods, following which a new set-up is created. The protagonists develop a relationship outside the norms and choose to be each other's permanent Eye and View, a life of mutuality and dependence, which the system was meant to discourage and hinder. Whereas Foucault claims that his role is to 'show people that they are much freer than they feel' (Foucault 1988:10), while employing the punitive supervisory concept of the Panopticon as a frightening vision of constant and concealed monitoring, Madsen replaces the penal supervision with a reverse system of monitoring where one is always 'on' both as a recipient and a contributor. Instead of being a passive, controlled object of societal justice, one is expected to play an active part in its definition and implementation, with the result that one internalizes the irony demonstrated in the Foucaultian idea of freedom. Madsen emphasizes the ambiguity and irony in the concept of sovereignty by painting a picture of a freedom achieved through its opposite – a freedom which will stay within the confines of civilization and allow the individuals a long, safe life, but which in essence has deprived the individuals of their innermost privacy and spirit. The individuals in *Det Syvende Bånd* no longer possess separate, private identities. The Panopticon allows for a punitive repercussion against subjects labeled as criminals (Foucault 2004: 551), but in Madsen we find all members of society subjected to constant vigilance and vigilante actions for their own good. The formative intermingling of the characters is illustrated by the point of view and narrative voice, which changes throughout the book from first to second to third person, emphasizing the inter-changeability and inter-dependence among the citizens.

Identity of the self

Self-identity in this novel is a never-ending work in progress, and children enter the chain in a rite of passage at the age of fourteen. They are taught the rules of expression, and through trial and error establish themselves as equal links in the chain, perpetuating the normative inter-subjectivity. The discourse of the citizens is defined by and framed within their social space, representative of a theory of their articulations being transmitted

through the biological code or physiological ‘memory’ and thus forming the ‘inborn bases of the symbolic function’ (Kristeva 1986b: 96). Nonetheless, their ‘language’ (the symbolic) is also ‘a social effect of the relation to the other, established through the objective constraints of biological...differences and concrete, historical family structure’ (97). In establishing a sense of language unifying their biological code and their relation to others, the protagonists may, then, be able to shape a full identity; as the novel suggests, this would be defined as an integration of the independent individual choice with the enforced societal structure of monitoring, an integration which appears impossible but essential to identity-formation.

The society is built on the seeming paradox of variation within uniformity. Expectations of social behavior and inter-subjective relationships are unequivocal and unavoidable, and transgressions are not tolerated. However, the individual citizens also become actors in their private lives since they are always performing for a watchful spectator. The State has absorbed the role of the Freudian ‘father as law’ who lays down the moral rules for the tribe (Kristeva 1986a: 261). The citizens have become addicted to their acting and their audience to the extent that they are incapable of initiating the break which would generate independence; they are caught in a Freudian trap where ‘the effects of earlier identifications...will always keep their general, lasting features’ (262). Therefore, the citizens enjoy their state of bondage and replace love with vicarious living and voyeurism.

Subject-formation

The protagonist, Sverre, suffers from the lack of a deep, sincere, lasting love-relationship. The constant shifts and distractions, switches between his own reality and that of somebody else, create a suspension of existence in which he is excited to follow his View, yet at the same time insecure about how to live his own life and reach his own goals. He exists as a subject only in identification with an ‘other’, and he is caught in between the mirror held up to him by his own ‘other’ (his Eye) and that in which he sees his ‘other’ (his View) reflected – a never-ending set of mirrors, confusingly depriving him of a fixed identity. His ‘other’ is chosen at random, and he is, therefore, unable to subscribe to the, essentially creative, ambiguity of Kristeva’s words that ‘Love is a death sentence that causes me to be’ (1986a: 252) and incapable of using love to turn himself into an absolute subject.

The narcissistic absorption of the mother as object of need is replaced by an absorption of the State-mechanisms, which, instead of creating a

subject, deflates and fragments it, again and again. Identity develops through the ability to signify using language, and through a child's identification with his mother, in which case sociality becomes a goal of self-identity. But in Madsen's world, as illustrated by the vacillating narrative voice, there are neither identities nor subjects, merely subjects-in-process in a negative sense. They do not achieve self-identity through a mother participating in the socio-symbolic system of language, but instead through a stranger who represents difference and distance. The important reflexivity which enables a subject to reflect upon his choices and identity is left undeveloped and discouraged in favour of escapism and passivity.

Words as creators of identity

The narcissistic qualities inherent in the Chain – the performance/exhibitionistic aspects – define the individual as incapable of love. If the State has replaced the Mother, then one's View should function as 'the other', the third party in the triangle ensuring that the child is loved by the mother and able to develop, but this does not happen because the View is caught inexorably in a similar triangle. There will always be a lack, an abjection, unless through words a connection is formed between Eye and View via the person in the middle.

This connection of words and their subsequent potential as identity-creators is the resolution suggested in the novel. The inclusion of the other's words leads to the absorption of the other's personality, which, in turn, leads to an expansion of the original one through the integrated other to a unified one. As Kristeva puts it: 'When the object that I incorporate is the speech of the other...I bind myself to him in a primary fusion, communion, unification. . . I become like him: One. A subject of enunciation' (1986a: 244). The protagonist, Sverre, is jumpstarted into motion and identity-formation through the words of an ancient crone, a reluctant, rebellious member of the Chain who does not subscribe to passivity and voyeurism but instead to individual, independent action. Her words – rambling, excessively sarcastic, even foul, and pithy – finally guide him towards a different reality and his own re-birth as a subject in a union with another. Overcoming his narcissism he finds love, and words are his building blocks of subject-formation, self-identity, and existence. The triangle of seeing and being watched turns into a reciprocal, dual vision. The novel has been criticized for losing its momentum at the end (Korsgaard 2008), but while agreeing that the hectic pace slows down to leave room for a brief, potentially idyllic, closure, I find that the ending aptly reflects the novel's purpose. When communication has moved from state-mandated supervision that caters to prying and (arguably) perverted

psyches towards a state of harmonious and voluntary exchange of thoughts and emotions, words have regained their powers actively to shape and communicate human identity.

Conclusion

In *Se dagens lys*, the saving grace in the seemingly hopeless predicament is the protagonists' individualized expression through language as the creator of subjectivity. Just like Laing used language to express individual intricacies within a social framework with the purpose of untangling the knots in order to separate, analyze, and comprehend the strands of existence, so Madsen allows the protagonists a glimpse of hope through their linguistically reconstructed subjective selves.

When Elef starts writing a diary, he makes an important existential choice. Through the written word, he attempts to fix his existence instead of uncritically uniting it with the predetermined social flow. He replaces the childlike dependence on a society which tells him everything with a quest to explore whether the conception of 'the world' with which he has been presented actually corresponds to 'reality' – and if there even is such a thing as reality outside the social power-structure. Elef expresses a desire to 'finde det bånd der kan knytte mine spredte dage sammen' (find the bond which can link my scattered days) (*Se Dagens Lys*: 34), and in the process he completes a journey from the external, and hence controllable, aspects of his personality to internal, subconscious ones – the rebirth. At the end, his partner Maya tells him that they are done (180), and he nods. Their manuscript has been read by a committee of young, enthusiastic people who agree that it was 'visionært og værdifuldt' (visionary and valuable) and find history to be 'en glimrende ting, som havde været forsømt' (an excellent thing which had been neglected) (180). In the face of their youth and earnestness, Elef feels very tired. The final line of dialogue encapsulates their life: 'Vi er de udødelige' (We are the immortals) (181). However, as I said at the beginning, there is no unambiguous happy ending for Madsen. This line echoes the events in George Orwell's *1984* – just before and while the rebellious lover-protagonists Winston and Julia are apprehended and tortured by the thought police (Orwell 1973: 175-6). In this ending, Madsen, then, shows us both hope and despair, the potential for victory of the individual as well as the triumph of society.

In his later novel, *Det syvende bånd*, Madsen chooses a more unequivocal ending. The protagonist, Sverre, is finally united with his ideal partner, Katri, of whom he asks:

'Udfyld mig, Katri. Uden dig er jeg intet. Ligesom dit liv er tomhed uden mig. Lad os derfor forenes, sådan at vi sammen kan udgøre en helhed ... der kan bære sig selv, holde sig selv oprejst, sammenhængende og selvberende. Lad os i fællesskab udbrede navn og form.' (*Det syvende bånd*: 237)

(Fill me up, Katri. Without you, I am nothing. Like your life is emptiness without me. Let us, therefore, be united, so we together can form an entity ... which can carry itself, keep itself upright, coherent and self-reliant. Let us together propagate name and form.)

By fixating their Eye and View reciprocally on each other, they become linked as a unit which defies the control and monitoring devices of society. The ending becomes the beginning of their new life as we leave them pondering the eternity of their choice. The individual definition of an existence free from state invasion becomes the ultimate choice. Their 'all in all' becomes a unit of just two, but they have gone behind the rules of the game, outwitted society, and revel in their future options. Perhaps the next installment in Madsen's portrayal of his network-universe will take us further into their shared life – but for the moment, we can observe the happiness of having thwarted the powers-that-be and exploited, reversed, and expanded their controlling force to create new, human, individualized growth.

Both novels portray individuals trapped in existential voids. Both novels guide the protagonists – and the readers – through winding paths towards identity. And in both novels the protagonists survive and live because of the creative power of words. At the end, the protagonists have emerged as subjects 'who are free to construct imaginary fantasies...to produce a new language.' (Moi 1986: 18).

Bibliography

- Bretall, Robert (ed.) (1946): *A Kierkegaard Anthology*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1977): *Power / Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Random House.
- Foucault, Michel (1988): *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar With Michel Foucault*. Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1997 [1984]): 'Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations.' In: *Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984. Vol. I.* Ed. Paul Rabinow. New York: The New Press.
- Foucault, Michel (2004): 'Discipline and Punish'. In: *Literary Theory: An Anthology*. Ed. Julie Rivkin & Michael Ryan. Malden: Blackwell.
- Gemzøe, Anker (2008): 'På Liv og død'. In: *Kulturkapellet*. Dec. 12 2008 <<http://www.kulturkapellet.dk/fiktionsanmeldelse.php>> Accessed 17 January 4,

2008

- Korsgaard, Christian Bonde (2006): 'Den Gode Galskab.' In: *Sentura*. August 16, 2006. <http://www.sentura.dk/svend_aage_anmeldelse.html> Accessed Dec. 12 2008
- Kristeva, Julia (1986a): 'Freud and Love: Treatment and its Discontents.' In: *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kristeva, Julia (1986b): 'Revolution in Poetic Language.' In: *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Laing, R. D. (1970): *Knots*. New York: Vintage Books.
- Madsen, Karina Søby (2007): 'Madsen, Svend Åge'. In *Mediefabrikken/ Dagbladet Information*, November 2007. <<http://www.forfatterweb.dk/oversigt/zmadsen00>> Accessed 20 May 2009
- Madsen, Svend Aage (1999): *Se Dagens Lys*. Copenhagen: Nordisk Forlag A/S.
- Madsen, Svend Åge (2006): *Det Syvende Bånd*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal.
- Moi, Toril (1986): 'Introduction.' In: *The Kristeva Reader*. Ed. Toril Moi. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Nielsen, Nicolai Rerup (2007): 'Verden fortalt fra Århus. Om Svend Aage Madsen'. In: *Litteratursiden* 1 April 2007. <<http://www.litteratursiden.dk/temaer/verden-fortalt-fra-%C3%A5rhus-om-svend-aage-madsen>> Accessed May 20 2009
- Olsen, Mette Elsig (2005): 'Svend Åge Madsen – Biografi'. In: *Litteratursiden*. <<http://www.litteratursiden.dk/forfattere/svend-%C3%A5ge-madsen>> Accessed 24 May 2009.
- Orwell, George (1973): *1984*. London: Penguin.
- Den Store Danske Encyclopædi. 'Svend Åge Madsen' <http://www.denstoredanske.dk/Kunst_og_kultur/Litteratur/Dansk_litteratur/Efter_1946/Svend_%c3%85ge_Madsen> Accessed 16 May 2009
- Weir, Allison (1995): 'Toward a Model of Self-Identity: Habermas and Kristeva.' In: *Feminists Read Habermas: Gendering the Subject of Discourse*. Meehan, Johanna Ed. New York: Routledge.