

## ***Preface***

This book is based on three articles published in 1998-2000 to introduce psychotherapists to Denmark's first-ever independent, practicing psychoanalyst and psychotherapist Dr.phil. Sigurd Næsgaard, who lived from 1883 to 1956. In expanded and revised form, these articles now form the main chapters of a biography of this extraordinary Danish philosopher, psychologist, and psychoanalyst. Much thought and effort has gone into making the new English edition of the articles more exciting and generally accessible to a wider range of readers, both mental health professionals and members of the general public with an interest in the dynamic transformation of Denmark, over less than a century, from a convention-bound rural society to a modern liberal democracy.

I guarantee that all readers who choose to accompany Sigurd Næsgaard on his life's journey will meet, along the way, a large number of the original - and often somewhat eccentric - personalities who made their impact on his early personal development, and to whom he would remain grateful for the rest of his life. You will also meet some of the teachers and mentors he held in affectionate respect, many of who reciprocated this affection - until such time as he began to think for himself and develop his own ideas and perception of life -, which often differed from theirs!

Sigurd Næsgaard was a controversial personality in his time, known especially for his cultural and social critique, and for his role as Denmark's first-ever practicing psychoanalyst. His admirers saw him as an apostle of freedom, whilst his opponents saw him as a threat, both to the authority held by the Establishment and to generally accepted social norms and moral standards.

In our modern welfare state, it is almost impossible to comprehend how deeply subservience to external authority, moral standards and tradition were once ingrained in Danish society, imposing social control on the daily life of the majority of the population and restricting individual freedom of behaviour. After the Second World War, however, this state of affairs would gradually change.

Sigurd Næsgaard was one of the influential characters that would make a significant impact on the status quo. His persistent questioning of the concept of normality - starting already in the 1920's with his deliberations on therapy - was a forerunner of the anti-psychiatry movement<sup>1</sup> of the 1960's and '70's, just as his early critical analysis of the concept of authority could be seen as a precursor of the anti-authoritarian youth revolt of the 1960's.

But how did Sigurd Næsgaard get to have such an enquiring mind?

An important part of the answer to this question can be found through a closer study of his childhood years growing up in a modern Danish farming family with ties to the cooperative movement. By the 1880's the cooperative movement had won a position of considerable strength and was beginning to challenging the old elite power structure dominated by the owners of the large estates.

Another formative influence on Sigurd Næsgaard was the Folk High School and the Free School movement inspired by N.F.S. Grundtvig (1783-1872) and Christen Kold (1816-1870). Sigurd Næsgaard's grandfather, his father and his uncle had all, from an early age, been attracted by Grundtvig's ideals of spiritual freedom in the school and in the church. Personal freedom of choice and independent decision-making were undisputed virtues in this approach to life.

A further contributory factor was that Sigurd Næsgaard, both whilst growing up and during his later education, was able to draw life-long inspiration from his friendship or acquaintance with some of the leading personalities of his time. Prominent amongst these was the Principal of Vraa Folk High School, Jørgen Terkelsen (1844-1931); seminary teacher Ludvig Jensen (1871-1950) and, maybe

---

<sup>1</sup>The anti-psychiatric movement still exists today, but was perhaps most clearly expressed in the 1960's by its advocates, including David Cooper (1931-86) and Ronald D. Laing (1927-89); the term "antipsychiatry" was formulated by David Cooper in 1967. The understanding of mental disorders must primarily be focused on an investigation of the extent to which society and the family actually generate sickness.

most important of them all, the renowned Professor of Philosophy, Harald Høffding (1843-1931).

There are a number of good reasons why Sigurd Næsgaard and his life's work should remain significant in our modern day and age.

Already when studying for his Masters by thesis (Magisterkonferens<sup>2</sup>) at the University of Copenhagen from 1909 to 1915, he had become one of the main Danish advocates of a clinical (psychotherapeutic) practice of psychology, and he kept this prominence for the rest of his life. On completing his Magister thesis, and up to the mid-1920s, he was rated in academic circles as one of Denmark's most promising researchers in the area of Philosophy and Psychology.

For a number of years, from the 1920s to the -40s, in collaboration with his child psychologist colleague Sofie Ribbjerg (1886-1981), he made an indelible impression on the historical development of Danish pedagogy.

Furthermore, from the late 1920's until his death in 1956, he held the distinction of being the first active practitioner of psychoanalysis in Denmark. From the 1930's onwards, several of Sigurd Næsgaard's rivalling opponents would sarcastically refer to him as "The High Priest of Freud in Denmark". Their choice of this nickname certainly did have a grain of truth behind it, both in relation to the way in which he made his public presentations and defended psychoanalysis against its critics and also in the nature of his own self-awareness. There were, however, some important differences.

---

<sup>2</sup>**Translator's note:** The *Magisterkonferens* was an academic degree bestowed by universities in Denmark from 1848 to 2007. It should not be confused with the *cand.mag. (candidatus magisterii)*, which corresponds to an American Master of Arts. Students in a magisterkonference program were required to have already obtained a Masters degree, and would normally expand on their Masters thesis by further research. The degree was thus a degree by research, which in some ways corresponded to the PhD program in the Anglo-Saxon system and was therefore often regarded as a PhD in English language context. On acceptance of a Magister thesis, the university would award the successful student the Latin title *magister artium* (teacher of the liberal arts), in Danish shortened to *mag.art.* or simply to *Magister*. Nowadays, a *mag.art.* degree is likely to be considered at an academic level with an M.Phil. degree still awarded by some universities in the UK system.

Even though the founder of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), was certainly one of Sigurd Næsgaard's greatest icons, this did not prevent Sigurd Næsgaard from incorporating his own psychological and pedagogical theories in his personal interpretation of psychoanalysis. He saw the fundamental theories of psychoanalysis as, first and foremost, being on a par with other humanistic based, scientific theories; i.e. as a point of departure for further research and studies.

To understand the background against which Sigurd Næsgaard, in his role as Denmark's first practicing psychoanalyst, could make his influence felt across such a wide range of activities, - through his psychotherapy practice, the study groups and associations he helped to set up, and through his written works and his defence of psychoanalysis, - it is therefore necessary to make a closer study of the rethinking he applied to the theory of psychoanalysis. Such a study will require some knowledge of his relative standpoints on central aspects of psychology and pedagogy.

The first part of this book, *Growing up and early sources of inspiration*, describes the path travelled by Sigurd Næsgaard on his journey toward the new world of psychoanalysis. Insight into Sigurd Næsgaard's personal background and development is an important basis on which to appreciate the very Danish way in which he interpreted psychoanalysis, and, thence, to understand the perception of psychoanalysis that was initially presented to the Danish public.

The second part of the book, *The published work and the Utopia of psychotherapy*, gives a general introduction to Sigurd Næsgaard's writings and, in chronological order, to the four productive periods and thematic focus areas of his life and work. In his later writings on psychoanalysis, it becomes increasingly clear how Sigurd Næsgaard - in pursuit of his ideal of a psychotherapeutic Utopia - strives to bring together the four thematic areas in a higher cohesive entity. The collected bibliography of Sigurd Næsgaard's published works can be usefully approached in the light of these four productive periods and thematic focus areas.

The third part of this book, *Midwife, original thinker, or plagiarist?* offers some observations and reflections on the influence Sigurd Næsgaard had on his contemporaries. It covers his work as a psychoanalyst and looks at the particular interest he took in the creative side of human nature as expressed through painting, literature and other art forms. This part of the book also describes the resistance he encountered along the way, even from some of his own professional colleagues.

The book is, of course, addressed to readers with an interest in the history of psychoanalysis and modern psychotherapy, and in the key actors who brought psychoanalysis into the spotlight on the various national stages and platforms. This book is, however, also addressed to any reader interested in cultural and social history in a broader perspective.

Sigurd Næsgaard's life and work illustrates and exemplifies an important period in the cultural history of modern Denmark, not least because of the central role Sigurd Næsgaard played in the history of pedagogical reform and of psychoanalysis, but also because of the deep impression he made on many national and international artists, and on their creative output. Seen in this perspective, Sigurd Næsgaard was one of the strongest driving forces of his time in promoting the concept of the independent, creative, spontaneous, free and authentically natural individual, which left its indelible mark on, in particular, abstract art and modern literature, well into the 20th Century.

From the overall perspective, we can move on to discuss the role of Danish psychoanalysis as an element in our cultural heritage as a whole. How to understand, for instance, the interplay between - on the one hand - the streams of thought on the reform pedagogy and psychoanalytic method that flow through Sigurd Næsgaard's life's work, and - on the other hand - Danish cultural identity? Is it possible to appraise and evaluate the impact made by psychoanalysis on the self-perception of Ms. or Mr. Average Dane, and on the way they see others? Is there, in fact, any such correlation?

The above questions are of universal relevance, and this book is published in English to make it accessible to an international readership. The translator, Charles Woollen, has contributed to the study of Sigurd Næsgaard by adding occasional "Translator's notes" to introduce readers not already familiar with Denmark to some of the major Danish cultural influences referred to in the book, without unduly disturbing the flow of the text. We hope that this brief supplementary background material will provide the international reader with a least an introduction to the cultural context in which Sigurd Næsgaard's work is so firmly anchored.

For further research, scholars may request access to the dedicated archive entitled "Sigurd Næsgaards efterladte papirer" (Surviving papers of Sigurd Næsgaard) at the Danish Royal Library (det Kgl. Bibliotek) in Copenhagen. The collection includes both published and unpublished book manuscripts, articles and academic dissertations, together with relevant personal correspondence and diaries.

The book can be read in its own right and requires no previous knowledge of its main personage. It can also serve as a supplement to my monograph on Sigurd Næsgaard published in 1989, and to other articles I have written on the history of psychoanalysis, philosophy and psychology in Denmark (cfr. *Applied Secondary Literature*).

In the mid-1980s, the first authors began to abandon their typewriters in favour of the new-fangled PCs coming on to the market. Word processing technology meant considerably lower costs for the publishers, who could now print the first draft of a manuscript directly from the diskette sent in by the author. Typewriters quickly became a thing of the past.

One fine day in the late summer of 1987, I delivered, by previous agreement, a diskette with the final manuscript of my first book on Sigurd Næsgaard to the editorial offices of Gyldendals Publishing House in central Copenhagen. A week later, I received a telephone call from my editor, Inge-Lise Franke, in a state of some

bewilderment. She regretfully informed me that there were no files saved on the disk I had delivered.

This was the starting signal for a breakneck race to search through old printouts and written notes. My otherwise zealously guarded working diskette unfortunately also turned out to be defective, and my PC, like most others at that time, had no hard disk. So, there was no choice but to recreate the manuscript. It took me a couple of months work on an old-school typewriter before I could finally deliver my resurrected manuscript to the editor. This was as good as it was going to get in the circumstances, a few rough edges perhaps, but at least readable, - and some months later the book duly came back from the printers.

This story was still not, however, complete. Six months after the printed book came out, the publishers for some reason returned my original diskette to me. My curiosity aroused, I put it into my disk drive and, to my astonishment, watched the lost manuscript pop up before my very eyes on the computer screen.

The present book thus also includes a good deal of the material that didn't make it into my first printed book on Sigurd Næsgaard, as it (at least for a while) was doomed to be lost from sight in the progressive and time-saving maelstrom of technological progress in the 1980s.

### *Acknowledgements*

I would like to start by giving my sincere thanks to Charles Woollen for his invaluable contribution in translating this book to English. Our collaboration has been impeccable.

As I have described several times in the book, it can be very difficult, nigh impossible, to translate quotes from the works of Sigurd Næsgaard from Danish to any other language. A number of the, for his times, innovative glossaries used by Næsgaard have either subsequently been absorbed into colloquial Danish or have fallen into disuse and lost their potency. They might therefore seem almost