

## THREE APPRECIATIONS OF PROFESSOR JOHN FORRESTER (1949–2015)

### For John

Karl Figlio

*University of Essex, Colchester, UK*

I thought I might write a letter to John, saying that I would like him to stop pretending now, and get in touch. His death was so sudden, unexpected by me and shocking, that I do not yet accept it. In a way, a letter after a long absence would fit with the nature of our relationship, which often spanned long periods with no communication, followed by a burst of emails, usually in response to a question from me: ‘Where did Freud say that the goal of psychoanalysis was to be able to love and work?’ We never found the answer to this so-often-repeated attribution, but we enjoyed searching for and discussing it.

John’s many achievements have been recorded by Simon Schaffer’s warm and admiring obituary, which appeared in *The Independent* newspaper (26 November 2015). I want simply to add a personal reflection on the more than 40 years of our friendship and colleagueship.

John and I met shortly after I arrived in Cambridge as a junior staff appointment in the newly founded Wellcome Unit for the History of Medicine, under the Directorship of Robert Young, in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science. I was floundering; John was an energetic post-graduate student. He attended my early Part II lectures in HPS, which he roundly praised against all evidence of their quality, and I took heart, not so much from his praise as from his engagement. To be taken seriously is worth a mountain of pats on the back.

And so to a powerful visual image. I have a photo of him and me, both young and at the start of an adventure: his thesis on Freud and language, my new job. To me, John radiated an inspiration by Freud, which pulled him forward into the ever-deepening scholarship for which he is so admired. He aimed to know the man who thought of himself as a conquistador and the father of an amazing new field that knew no bounds.

I came to an understanding of John’s passion when, early in our friendship, he wanted to show me his room. It was typical of the minimal, multi-purpose space of a post-graduate student of limited financial means. But that was all that was typical. John had papered the walls of his room, floor to ceiling, corner to corner, leaving no uncovered gap with – wallpaper? No! John’s enthusiasm covered every inch of every wall: notes, drawings, diagrams, arrows, tables, summaries, ideas from and about the *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. As I said, he aimed to know this man, Freud, and his thinking. He hadn’t quite finished the whole thing at that point, but he was on the way, and would not stop until he had.

Although John was inspired by Freud, he was not about to let him rule the roost. His book on the Wolfman shows him combining the work of psychoanalytic interpretation with the evidence demanded by the historian and the subtlety of literary criticism to wring out from the case everything that it could reveal. Recently, looking through some old files I recalled that, long before this book, John pursued his research in Vienna. He in Vienna, I in Cambridge, began a lengthy correspondence, gradually and a bit ambitiously pretentious, beginning to think of ourselves as reliving the vivid intellectual and personal journeys of Freud with his corresponding interlocutors. But it was indeed an interesting correspondence to both of us, and it reminds me of John's importance to my thinking over many years.

I think again of that photo, fully aware of John's later, more professorial stature: a bit more portly, a bit more bent, a bit wizened in the face, a bit slower in gait – well, we have all come to look like that. But I also think that he never lost that inspired youthfulness displayed in the early photo, and I am sure that his many friends, colleagues and students share my view that here was a man inspired by scholarly curiosity, which he willingly and rewardingly shared with us. So, once again, I say to John: 'Stop fooling around; we have work to do. Where did Freud ...? What did he mean by ...?'

*Karl Figlio is Professor in the Centre for Psychoanalytic Studies, University of Essex, UK.*  
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## **A brief memory of John Forrester**

Robert Hinshelwood

*University of Essex, Colchester, UK*

I knew John only slightly, but over many years. He was important in heading a significant department at Cambridge on the history of psychoanalysis. I recall an important moment for me when, in 2004, I had detailed conversations with him about becoming editor of the Journal *Psychoanalysis and History*. Ten years earlier I had established the journal with Andrea Sabbadini, who took on the role of editor, while I did the publishing of the journal. By 2004 Andrea had done a 10-year stint – quite enough, I agreed; so I had to find a new editor. There was not a big field of possibles, and John was far and away *the* candidate for the new editor.

He did not make it difficult to discuss the possibility with him, but he was very cautious about thinking about it. He knew it would curtail somewhat his own research, and he was even then working on his *Freud in Cambridge* (still to be published). I remember we had a long walk one summer's afternoon, three circuits of Queens Square in London, to discuss the implications and the workload; and after thinking it through, a month later a leisurely lunch in his college in Cambridge. I kind of knew he was keen, but it was a great relief when he did finally commit himself to take on the role.

I was very grateful indeed for his decision, as I knew it would be the making of the journal, which would then be established with his editorship. In the end I was grateful, too, that he had so carefully thought about it, and it left me with confidence that he knew what he was taking on and he believed he could do it well – and mostly perhaps that after careful thought he considered the journal worth taking on. His