

## **THINKING IN CASES**

**John Forrester**  
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**Reviewed by: Gerald J. Gargiulo**

This is the final text from a noted historian of psychoanalysis whose many impressive texts include *Language and the Origins of Psychoanalysis*; *The Seductions of Psychoanalysis*; *Truth Games: Lies, Money and Psychoanalysis*. All are tributes to a rich intellectual life dedicated to exploring the roots, influences and consequences of the psychoanalytic enterprise. Adam Phillips notes in his introduction “it was also Forrester’s gift to show us that questions about psychoanalysis are questions about the history and philosophy of science - -to which he devoted his professional life with such rigour and wit.” (p.xii) The present book is a short collection of essays, on rather disparate topics, held together by the author’s expertise in illustrating the influence that psychoanalytic insights have had on various topics. Forrester notes that

“Psychoanalytic writing is not just writing about psychoanalysis; it is writing subject to the same laws and processes as the psychoanalytic situation itself. In this way psychoanalysis can never free itself of the forces it attempts to describe.” (p.xv) The author’s constant dialectic throughout the text is the dialogue between the necessarily hidden and the transparently shown – like that between conscious and unconscious.

Forrester’s chapter on Thomas Kuhn is especially interesting as the author recalls being a student in Kuhn’s class at Princeton University; such memories function as a framework for many of his observations. The author reflects on Kuhn’s contributions and notes the fact that Kuhn underwent a personal psychoanalysis and used this experience as a model for “getting into another’s mind.” This chapter is dense with insight/observation, not only about Kuhn but also about other major twentieth century thinkers such as the noted historian Collingwood. Forrester notes “What Kuhn adds to Collingwood is the struggle with incommensurability, for which the gestalt switch is Kuhn’s personal presiding metaphor, the same great achievement that Foucault famously described: ‘the thing we apprehend in one great leap, the thing that...is

demonstrated as the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that' (Foucault 2002: xvi)...Kuhn's programme was for the historian to take that leap inside the heads of past scientists, to become past scientists)." (p.40)

Equally insightful is Forrester's two chapters on the work and contributions of Robert Stoller. These chapters focus on Stoller's groundbreaking contributions to our understanding(s) of sexual fantasies and the distinction between gender and sexual identity. Forrester's presentation will engender, I believe, an appreciation of the remarkable contributions Stoller made; most of his insights and findings are now simply accepted cultural assumptions, within the psychoanalytic world and beyond. In each of his studies, Forrester goes beyond the basics of fact(s) and offers variable psychoanalytic lines of thought. For example, "Stoller strived for the variety of objectivity achieved by intersubjective agreement – a rare enough event, psychoanalytically, but still subject to the suspicion that it derived from the logic of the *folie a deux*. Given the materials on which this essay is based [Stoller's case history of his patient Belle] how could it provide more than that? " (p.86)

A brief chapter on D.W. Winnicott, entitled, “On Holding as Metaphor: Winnicott and the Figure of St Christopher” (recounting the story of St Christopher, who carried the world on his shoulders) sensitively conveys how Winnicott could hold a patient, until a patient could hold him or herself. This example entailed the case of a young boy who lost his father following a tragic boating accident in which the boat they were in capsized. It is an excellent summary of how Winnicott worked – his focusing on and naming a patient’s illness so that the surrounding facilitating environment (particularly the mother, but the school as well) could do their job – of course with some help from DWW as well. In a singularly perceptive observation, Forrester notes, “Where does psychoanalysis’ power to transform, to carry, to transfer come from? Freud’s answer was: not suggestion, but transference. Winnicott’s answer was: holding. Winnicott’s answer, like Freud’s, comes close to saying that there is a fundamental metaphoricity at the heart of such answers.” (p.103)

In his chapter, “Two Jewish Scientists” Forrester provides the reader with some generally unknown and very human sides of both Freud and Einstein. Their relationship was ambivalent for many years, and yet each

was respectful of the other's contributions. While Einstein never accepted Freud's theories, he was in awe of Freud's writings and praised them continually. Forrester quotes from their letters, which reveal the occasional tension between them, but also their admiration for each other. From the few examples given, I sensed that Freud was more desirous of Einstein's recognition rather than the reverse. On one occasion, Freud reminds Einstein that he had inherited a science and built on it, whereas Freud had to build his science from the floor up. True, of course. The text does not mention Einstein's response, if any.

This is an interesting and an informative collection of essays. This brief review does not adequately reflect the complexity of the author's thought and approach. Psychoanalysis has made us aware, and Forrester does as well, that even as one reveals one necessarily also conceals. In this sense, each chapter is a case to be studied, reflected upon and recognized for what it says, what it cannot say, and for the revelatory ambiguity that a psychoanalytic approach necessarily entails.

