

**BROKEN FATHERS/ BROKEN SONS: A PSYCHOANALYST REMEMBERS, BY
GERALD J. GARGIULO NEW YORK: RODOPI, 2008; 160 PP., \$20.00.**

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The hapless fate of Humpty Dumpty is familiar to us from the nursery rhyme:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again.

Dr. Gerald Gargiulo's moving memoir portrays transcending a painful childhood of feeling like a broken son, a "Humpty Dumpty" to his disappointing "broken father." Although identification with the fate of Humpty Dumpty haunted him, it is paradoxical. After all, though all the king's horses couldn't put him back together again, Humpty Dumpty had once been whole, and, as egg, had held all the creative possibilities of being fertilized, and containing the ingredients for a new life. It seemed to me that some such underlying belief must have been true for Gargiulo to spur his hopeful encounters with many king's horses, many kings men. These included teachers, priests, therapists and a psychoanalyst.

In Gargiulo's poignant search for a meaningful identity as "whole" he first turns to God and a Carmelite monastery, and then, eventually, becomes a psychoanalyst, with special compassion for the patients who consult him, and a great capacity for forgiveness and acceptance. Recently, as members of the American Psychoanalytic Association were seeking a definition of psychoanalysis for the lay public, Gargiulo proposed: "Psychoanalysis is a clinical treatment that helps individuals feel real, competent and involved in their world. It addresses those experiences, both remembered and forgotten, that block or distort achieving such integration. At the conclusion of treatment a person should be able to love, to work and to play." Gargiulo chronicles the workings of this process in his own life. He tells us: "Like a large puzzle on the playroom floor, I am piecing together, searching to remember what must have happened, for me to have feelings that I have" (p. 4).

Hearing the nursery rhyme in school, Gargiulo feared it foretold "a punishment that could easily befall me" (p. 4) "—or worse, had it already happened?" (p. 5) Gargiulo recalls the childhood forces that left him feeling shattered. They included his father's explosive outbursts, his mother's "collapse" into serious depression during his adolescence, and his own early learning difficulties. Each parent, it seems, could represent aspects of Humpty too.

During grammar school, Gerald daydreamed, becoming "content with my classmates thinking I was stupid" (p. 7) He wondered, "Was I perhaps, in my daydreaming and not learning, just angry with my father?" (p. 8). But the cost was high "I was increasingly alienated, self-conscious and humiliated... I was struggling with a deep confusion, a break up within me... apparently someone inside me had called a general strike and I did not know how to call it off" (p.8) Father became "loud and more thunderous" as Gerald grew older. "He so intimidated my mother, with his yelling whenever meals or schedules did not go exactly as he planned, that her anxiety or fear engulfed" Gerald and his brother. "His needs were the rules of the house," (p. 12) Gargiulo states: "It was his anger at the most haphazard of things, totally

unpredictable to my childhood reasoning, which continued to off-balance me ... There was, it seemed, little I could do right ... increasingly, I substituted observation and self-enclosure for any possibility of a relationship" (p. 13)

When Gerald was around 12 his mother became profoundly depressed, attempting to mask it with alcohol. For some years, "father, frustrated with his absent wife and unable to understand her illness, or any roll he had in it, would violently attack her if he thought she had been drinking. His yelling and her crying and screams for help ...still echo within me" (p. 14-15) "It fell to me, as well as my brother, to care for a mother who would not care for herself." After some years, mother was hospitalized (Gerald wondered "would she remember her name as our mother who could not care for herself." After some years, mother was hospitalized (Gerald wondered "would she remember her name as our mother?"), but returned improved, like her own self (p. 15).

Fortunately, Gerald stayed receptive to positive input from adults. He had a good experience with a child psychiatrist. He can't remember his face "but I know it was kind and he was interested in me;" while "I had respite from the dark moods of my father. A place, at last, where I didn't feel stupid and defective... Ever so slowly my capacity to learn, which had eluded me so far and caused me such shame, showed itself on the horizon and magically, it seemed my fears of the dark began to recede." As soon as Gerald "felt good that something was changing inside me" father, citing cost, ended treatment. (p. 11) But Gerald had been inspired to master reading. During adolescence a gentle tutor helped "make the letters on the page friends and not foes." Starting to read, "I read all the literature I could manage to stumble through. I would piece together words, then sentences, dictionary constantly at my side, even while riding the elevated train to my high school." He joined the classic book club, reading *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: "I felt a special kinship with these ancient heroes, as if by reading their words and deeds they became my secret friends. As I struggled through these books, I felt I had found, on my own, another world. I had, in fact, found a place of refuge" (p. 17).

At age 18 he began to think about becoming a priest. "I slowly began to feel that by embracing the Church's teaching, and deepening my faith," I was assured of good insides... I was promised a protective loving father in God and a reliable mother in the Church. I was pledged not king's armies but angels who would help me in my healing". Eventually, and with the support of a therapist, he questions the authority of religious teachings, stops short of ordination as priest, and begins his training to become a psychoanalyst. "I was no longer that odd fellow always falling off walls" (p. 39). Soon, and happily, he married. Gerald remembers:

As Humpty fell, a few years seemed like forever, particularly with all those horses milling about. You can imagine the sight of it all, although the rhyme doesn't give us any of the unsettling details. A leg here, another arm there, a foot strewn over some rocks at the other side of the wall. Finally Humpty's head, loosely held together, with such confusion and pain in his eyes that one would want to release him and save him from the sight of his dismembered body draping the inhospitable ground. Such was the state of my psyche coming out of a childhood of dark fears, of little learning and beginning adolescence shadowed by a mother's collapse. (p. 16)

I now want to join Gargiulo in playing (one of his goals for psychoanalysis) with his "puzzle on the playroom floor": I digress from his narrative to invoke some other authors' versions of Humpty Dumpty, as tentative pieces for his puzzle. First is a portrayal of intergenerational transmission of a father's anger. It is from a book of poems titled "Mrs. Dumpty," authored by the wife of an explosively troubled

husband. One wonders if the rages at mealtime, which Gerald also experienced, lead to ingestion of anxiety in place of positive nurturance and words.

*Why was that door locked? I want
The front door open when I get home
And the lights on, the minute
You hear me honking. He slams
The door behind him, dashes
The porcelain bowl from the table.
Drips of oil shiver to the floor,
Fork and knife, little wings
Of frayed lettuce. A few
bleak words bitten off and I snap
at our son, who enters
laughing. And now
the child is pulling the cat's tail
with both hands. The cat
is storing up minus signs like a battery,
sharpening its claws" (Bloch, 1998)*

Other literature alludes to Humpty Dumpty as achieving mastery and integration, a reversal of feeling shattered. Gargiulo had noted "I had spent years puzzled as to how one put letters down on paper in sequence to convey meaning" (p. 8), fearing words as "foes" (with a tempter). In Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass* Humpty Dumpty discusses semantics with Alice during a game of chess. (Carroll, 1872/1999) and takes pride in mastery over giving words meaning.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean – neither more nor less." "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things." "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master – that's all." Alice was too much puzzled to say anything, so after a minute Humpty Dumpty began again. "They've a temper, some of them – particularly verbs, they're the proudest – adjectives you can do anything with, but not verbs – however, I can manage the whole lot!" (p. 57)

Gargiulo's narrative highlights the power of integrating previously inaccessible memories, to "open up" in the affectively holding presence of his therapist's, psychoanalyst's and wife's ways of listening. Throughout James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, (Joyce, 1939/1976) the male protagonist, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, is compared to Humpty Dumpty, symbolizing the fall of all men. His subconscious, which he "breaks open" every night as he sleeps, contains all the fragments of history, which his wife collects and puts back together again in the morning (unlike the rhyme). "How bootifull and how truewife of her ... to steal our historic presents from the past postpropheticals so as to will make us all lordy heirs and ladymaidens of a pretty nice kettle of fruit .. and even if Humpty shall fall frumpty times" (p. 11-12).

Gargiulo's story illustrates the son's need for a father who can give and receive love. It is reminiscent of a passage from Barthelme:

He is mad about being small when you were big, but no, that's not it, he is mad about being helpless when you were powerful, but no, not that either, he is mad about being contingent when you were necessary, not quite it, he is insane because when he loved you, you didn't notice. (Barthelme, 1975)

Various welcome revisions about the role of the libidinal relationship to father have affected psychoanalytic theory in recent decades. At a meeting of the American Psychoanalytic Association, (around 1990) Peter Blos, Sr. spoke off the cuff of having accepted his own analyst's interpretation of his negative Oedipus complex, with its passive homosexual longings, to be mastered by being renounced. He wondered wistfully how his life might have been affected if there had been analysis of the progressive (rather than regressive) dyadic isogender relationship, of which had been deprived. Blos revised his own theorizing (Blos, 1985), convinced that "the early experience of being protected by a strong father and caringly loved by him becomes internalized as a lifelong sense of safety in a Boschian world of horrors and dangers," and establishes "a libidinal bond of a profound and lasting kind." In adolescence the boy needs a "blessing" conferred by the father.

The residues of the libidinal bond lie, to a large extent, buried under forceful repression once adolescence is passed. The profundity of this infantile experience, when roused into emotional re-animation during analysis, remains usually inaccessible in its latent intensity by verbalization alone. It finds expression via affect-motor channels, such as uncontrollable weeping and sobbing, when overwhelming feelings of love and loss in relation to the dyadic father torments the patient.

In contrast to these affects of passion, the manifest son-father relationship may be remembered "with a sense of gnawing disappointment following the boy's alert and sensitive registration of the father's shortcomings which disqualify him as the son's hero or worthy opponent. The son may remain eternally remorseful over having failed to evoke his due measure of the father's approval, pleasure and loving support in growing up and becoming recognized as his 'big boy.'" Blos implies the value of reaching such layers of longings at their affective source, as well as affirmation of being "grown," now one's own man. Herzog (2001) also writes movingly about the deep reach of father hunger, as it emerges in the transference, and becomes transformed in his patients' experience of him. Herzog has highlighted the importance of the child's internalization of a "triadic reality," representations of self with mother, self with father, as well as self-with-mother and-father together. So the nature of the intimacy between the parents, so troubled for Gargiulo, also impacts the child's experience of father

Freud, stressing Oedipal competition, was not comfortable accepting some of his patient's loving desires. He blamed Ferenczi's "homosexual libido" toward him for much of their eventually tragic alienation. Ferenczi, not being able to work through either his love or hate for his analyst, for a time advocated healing through the enactment of affection (a mistake!). But, as Hoffer (1991) noted, he "had a specific notion of what had to happen before termination would occur." Just before his final meeting with Freud, Ferenczi writes in his diary: "Finally it is also possible to view and remember the trauma with feelings of forgiveness and consequently understanding. The analyst who is forgiven enjoys in the analysis what was denied him in life and hardened his heart. Mutual forgiveness!" In this way Ferenczi opines that the analyst also seeks restitution for having had to harden his heart.

Gargiulo's experience with this analyst made it unnecessary for him to "harden his heart" in his own approach to patients. As Gargiulo listens to his father's tales of his own miserable childhood and

eventually forgives him, he is aware that forfeiting the delicate love between them would also be forfeiting memory, too costly for integrity of self. He writes:

*Butterflies are more
Than a yellow breeze
Alighting arbitrarily
Delicate
Like love
So easily undone
If you wave them away
In a moment of forgetfulness,
Your loss will be an empty memory.*

We are told that when Father dies, it is in the embrace of his grieving son. Before his death “I read my poems to my father and he listened.” And, in this way he connects to the listening psychoanalyst.

With most of the book prioritizing Gargiulo’s inner experience eloquently, we can’t have everything. Gargiulo portrays some of the issues with which he struggled, and the influence of his analyst, and therapists before him, as comforting, affirming and vitalizing. As he puts it; “Dr. Tom’s couch supported, each weekday, all the remaining pieces of my Humpty self that had not yet come together.” But I would have liked more experiential description of what actually transpired, early, later and after the analysis to affect the changes to which he alludes. What did the analyst actually say in different phases of the analysis, what did Gargiulo surmise about what they felt toward him, what were the most painful, conflicted, vulnerable and gratifying moments? What did Gargiulo believe were the analyst’s theoretical frameworks, and how did his own later way of working with patients reflect or differ from what he experienced? In my own work on analysts’ memories of their own analysts, I found that such questions were intricately linked to the qualities of satisfactions or dissatisfactions with the analysis, post-termination, and the unique features of the analysts they became. (Tessman, 2003)

Perhaps Gargiulo will elaborate in future writings. However, he leaves no doubt about feeling that the intergenerational transmission of “brokenness” has ended, that he now enjoys the identities of deeply loving husband, nurturing father and generative psychoanalyst. As psychoanalyst, he believes that diversity of opinion need not shatter the field, that if there is connection, Humpty Dumpty won’t be in need of glue. In a tribute to Theodore Reik, in whose institute he was a candidate, he cites his mentor about the next generation of psychoanalysts: “We do not know them, but we feel close to them. People need not be glued together when they belong together (Reik, 1948, p. 514)”.

Gerald Gargiulo’s narrative rides on a multilayered flow of associations. It has been said that one must break eggs to make omelets. The reader who accompanies Gargiulo’s Humpty Dumpty will be rewarded with awareness that Gargiulo continues to stir new ingredients into his multilayered omelets.

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