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The Power Relationship between Father and Daughter:  
Fitzgerald's "Babylon Revisited" and "Lo, the Poor Peacock!"

Sachiko Tachibana

F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote "Babylon Revisited" (1931) and "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" (1971) respectively a few years before and after the publication of *Tender Is the Night* (1934) which features the incestuous relationship between father and daughter. Each of the short stories has the father of one daughter as its protagonist. While many critics are willing to recognize "Babylon Revisited" as Fitzgerald's finest story, "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" with the past that magazines never accepted it, has been very seldom referred to, let alone analyzed. An exceptional critic is Ruth Prigozy who focuses on the latter in her essay on Fitzgerald's unpublished stories. She decides that "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" is a failure and attributes its failing to the characterization of the defiant and insolent daughter, Jo, whom Prigozy calls the "little woman." On the assumption that the author "is clearly more interested in the problems of middle-aged failure and survival," she complains that "the dramatic incidents revolve about Jo" (Prigozy 519). She contrasts Jo with the "little girls" in successful stories and approves the latter:

He [Fitzgerald] had already published two affecting stories ("Babylon Revisited" and "Outside the Cabinet-Maker's," 1928) about little girls whose womanly solicitude for their fathers adds a poignant note to tales of adult disillusion. In neither story does Fitzgerald cast the child as psychological center of interest as he fitfully attempts

here. Nor does he forget that Honoria and the other little girl are children. . . . (Prigozy 519)

Her opinion generally agrees with the common view on Honoria in "Babylon Revisited" that she is the embodiment of girlish modesty and is meek and mild to her father Charlie. The closer scrutiny of the text, however, makes it clear that Honoria is not so much obedient to her father, but she refuses to abide by his order like Jo, the rebellious "little woman." It is in the house of Lincoln Peters, where she is living apart from Charlie, that Honoria actually behaves docilely. I begin my discussion with the analysis of Lincoln Peters to show how he exercises his paternal authority, as a clue for explicating the power relationship between father and daughter in each story. Both fathers, Charlie and Jason, unsuccessfully try to control their respective daughters. I will point out that their words take on incestuous overtones when they become conscious of their weak authorities over the daughters.

### **I. Lincoln Peters as a Patriarch**

The setting of "Babylon Revisited" is Paris where Charlie, wealthy now, returns after an absence of nearly two years to visit Honoria who is living with her aunt and uncle, Marion and Lincoln Peters. As the story unfolds, it is revealed that reduced to poverty by the stock-market crash and sick from excessive drinking, Charlie relinquished custody of Honoria to his sister-in-law Marion after the death of his wife. Marion, who shows her hatred toward Charlie openly, has much attracted critical attention as Charlie's toughest obstacle to regaining custody of his daughter, whereas her husband Lincoln has been almost ignored, slighted as "a foil to both his wife's overwrought emotions and to Charlie's intrepidity" (Bloom 56). Here we must take much notice of Lincoln during the

tripartite talks about custody, then it turns out he never serves as a mere "foil." Charlie and Marion tend to be emotional, and the more they speak, the more and more entangled the situation grows. Then Lincoln makes a rational explanation for the matter, bringing order out of confusion by his words: "We're getting off the subject. You [Charlie] want Marion to set aside her legal guardianship and give you Honoria. I think the main point for her is whether she has confidence in you or not" (BR 640). He has a great influence over two others: Charlie is pleased that Lincoln reproves Marion for her absurd remark, thinking he has "won a point" (BR 641); since "[g]lancing at her husband, she [finds] no help from him," Marion abruptly "[throws] up the sponge" (BR 642). Lincoln fills the role of a judge with decision-making authority and not of a "broker" as Weston puts it (Weston 119).

In the final scene he decides not to leave Honoria to Charlie because he cannot have Marion "go to pieces" (BR 648), that is, he has to keep his family from confusion. He is the authoritative patriarch who unifies his family and maintains order within the world of his house. His name, Lincoln Peters, symbolizes paternal authority: his given name is associated with the President Lincoln, "Father Abraham," who advocated the cause of Unionism and restored order in the United States; peter is slang for phallus which is a symbol of power and authenticity of the Father in the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. The Father is a guarantor of truth and meaning in language. Throughout the story, Lincoln defines the true meanings of what appears to be irrational, such as Charlie's taking one drink a day and Marion's excessive hostility to Charlie. On his second visit to the Peters home, Charlie notices that Lincoln radiates "the animation of one who ha [s]

already been talking" (BR 639). Lincoln has a powerful voice within the home and he alone is enabled to speak out to his family. Indeed Marion appears to be more talkative than her husband in the text, but her utterance is actually confined to the dialogues with Charlie, an outsider. Except for her sharp words with him, Marion does not converse with Lincoln nor with their children and the children are speechless, as if their voices were suppressed. Similarly Honoria is reticent within the home. She expresses herself to Charlie only in monosyllables: she cries "Oh, daddy, daddy, daddy, daddy, dads, dads, dads!" when she welcomes him inside the house (BR 633); "Only on his lap" she whispers a single word "When?" to signify her expectation that she will soon come to live with him (BR 645).

Lincoln exerts his paternal authority most effectively in the climactic scene where two of Charlie's former cronies, both gloriously drunk, barge into the Peters home. Bringing the spirit of dissipation there, they interrupt Charlie's negotiations for his daughter and act as the catalyst that ultimately deprives him of Honoria. Their intrusion disturbs the domestic circle. After Marion, uttering the sound "Oh!," helplessly escaped to her own room, Lincoln calmly demands children to dine:

Lincoln set down Honoria carefully.

"You children go in and start your soup," he said, and when they obeyed, he said to Charlie:

"Marion's not well and she can't stand shocks. That kind of people made her really physically sick."

"I don't tell them to come here. They wormed your name out of somebody. They deliberately —"

"Well, it's too bad. It doesn't help matters. Excuse me a minute."

Left alone, Charlie sat tense in his chair. In the next

room he could hear the children eating, talking in monosyllables, already oblivious to the scene between their elders. (BR 646-7)

It is notable that immediately after Honoria and his children obeyed his order to dine, they are thoroughly oblivious to the disturbance that the invaders caused and back to their normal state, "talking in monosyllables." I should explain this with some reference to the theory of Seymour Fisher about Body Image which he developed on the basis of Freud's theories. According to Fisher, Western culture "strive[s] for rationality," and so in the home parents teach their child that "[a]ction must be based on rational 'reasons': "Even basic body feelings like hunger or the need to defecate are typically relegated to the control of more cognitively oriented schedules, which dictate when it is proper to respond to such feelings" (Fisher 11). He continues, imposing their standards on a child and making regulations on the child's "drives like hunger and sex" in the name of discipline, parents make sure of their control over the child. Fisher assumes that "feeding" is a maternal domain and a mother, through feeding her child, can convey implicitly "her underlying feelings about 'owning' the child" (Fisher 35). Yet in Fitzgerald's work the act of feeding is more often connected with the authority of a father as a provider. At meals a father tries to prove himself a patriarch. His child's acquiescence to his directions as to meals signifies that the father can control and own his child. In the scene above, Lincoln, who makes children obey his directions, proves himself a steadfast patriarch: the confusion that surrounded children is dispelled and the order in his home smoothly returns under his control.

## II. Charlie and Honoria Wales in "Babylon Revisited"

As Seymour L. Gross remarks, "Charlie Wales's return to Paris is an attempted return to fatherhood" (Gross 400). Charlie says to the Peters, "I'm awfully anxious to have a home. . . . And I'm awfully anxious to have Honoria in it" (BR 639). He wishes to establish an orderly household where he plays the central role as a patriarch, substituting his sister for his dead wife "to keep house" for him (BR 639). The atmosphere of the dinner at the Peters home for which Charlie joins them during his first visit stirs up paternity in him: "At dinner . . . [a] great wave of protectiveness [toward Honoria] went over him. He thought he knew what to do for her" (BR 634). The next day he begins a date with Honoria by lunching together as if in rivalry with Lincoln, her surrogate father. Charlie endeavors to create a wholesome home atmosphere with regularity: he deliberately chooses "the only restaurant he [can] think of not reminiscent of champagne dinners and long luncheons that began at two and ended in a blurred and vague twilight" and sits opposite Honoria just "at [n]oon" (BR 635). When the meal starts, he instructs her as follows:

"Now, how about vegetables? Oughtn't you to have some vegetables?"

"Well, yes."

"Here's *épinards* and *chou-fleur* and carrots and *haricots*."

"I'd like *chou-fleur*."

"Wouldn't you like to have two vegetables?"

"I usually only have one at lunch." (BR 636)

Honoria gives priority to her own standards for meal and clearly expresses her will to Charlie. She can refuse to be controlled by him because he is not qualified as a patriarch against his desire. Charlie is an unsteady father who is still

attracted to the old way of life and its childishness as is pointed out by some critics. He becomes aware that she is “already an individual with a code of her own,” and consequently, he is “more and more absorbed by the desire of putting a little of himself into her” (BR 638). Then she expresses her view about the meal again and drives him to a total nonplus:

... Charlie watched Honoria's eyes leave their table, and he followed them wistfully about the room, wondering what they saw. He met her glance and she smiled.

“I liked that lemonade,” she said.

What had she said? What had he expected? (BR 638)

When Charlie realizes his little paternal authority over Honoria, his desperate desire to possess his daughter expresses itself in his words with incestuous overtones. In the middle of lunch he suddenly says to her, “I want to get to know you,” and formally introduces himself as Charles J. Wales of Prague. He makes advances to her as if he wanted to “know” her in the Biblical sense and is delighted when she quickly responds, imaginatively accepting the role of an adult woman. The role-playing game is short, however, because Honoria stops it by her tactful remark. She reestablishes the order of their relationship into which he introduced confusion:

“Married or single?”

“No, not married. Single.”

He indicated the doll. “But I see you have a child, madame.”

Unwilling to disinherit it, she took it to her heart and thought quickly: “Yes, I've been married, but I'm not married now. My husband is dead.”

He went on quickly, “And the child's name?”



"Simone. That's after my best friend at school."

"I'm very pleased that you're doing so well at school."

(BR 636)

Male pays attention to Honoria's power over Charlie during the meal:

It is significant that it is Honoria who brings the conversation to reality with this reference to school, because in this whole scene she is educating her father. She approves his suggestion that they go to the vaudeville but frowns on his approval of unlimited spending at the toy store. (Male 417)

She can educate her father and control him according to her own code. While they are alone together, she holds her superiority over her real father Charlie. Honoria faces him, behaving not like an obedient "little girl" but as a "little woman" with her autonomy.

### III. Jason and Jo Davis in "Lo, the Poor Peacock!"

The extended contact between Charlie and Honoria takes place only in Part II of the story constituted of five parts, whereas "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" written about four years later centers about the relationship between father and daughter, Jason and Jo Davis. The circumstances of the latter pair bear a certain similarity to those of the former: the Davis family once lived lavishly in Paris, and now the household loses Jo's mother in substance because she has been long hospitalized with tuberculosis. The power relationship between Jason and Jo is changing through the story: like an hourglass, as Jason's authority gradually decreases, Jo is increasing in power and finally becomes the pillar of her family. There are some food-related parts in the story, each of which conveys a hint as to

the state of their power relationship.

The Davis family was compelled by Jason's business losses to abandon their lavish Paris home and return to America. His business has tapered off to a trickle and Jo's faith in her father is already shaken before the story begins. In the opening scene he orders her to attend public school because he can no longer afford to send her to private school. He thinks it is the best that he gives orders shortly after meal, namely, after feeding her. He begins to speak to her at the dining table while she is still fixing her eyes on a lingering crumb. Jason manages to exercise his paternal authority over his daughter at this stage. His voice is powerful enough to repress her objection and her weeping "silently" indicates acquiescence (LP 593). They then go to see Jo's mother Annie Lee. On their way to the hospital Jason commands, "Don't tell mother about school," and Jo, still weeping, replies quietly, "I won't say anything" (LP 594). She has followed his directions during their visit to Annie Lee: although her mother eagerly asks about her, Jo does not say anything but a few words, "Of course, Mama" and "I don't know, Mama" (LP 594).

Later on Jo begins to challenge his authority and friction arises between them. When he speaks in an imperative tone, she flashes out at his words:

"You'd better," her father said.

"Why do you say I'd *better*?"

In their new isolation these two talked and fought against each other like adults....

Jason hated that it should be that way, hated her to see him in moments of discouragement. (LP 596)

Jason feels the need to recover his dignity. At breakfast the next Saturday he proposes to Jo going out to the sausage farm

of which he took over the management from his wife's mother. He attempts to show off his power as a provider of food, though in vain. While they are in the farm, it is revealed that under his poor management the sausage has fallen off in quality and so the farm provides little income. He cannot even inform her about the ingredients of a sausage exactly: he fails to "[feed] Jo's insatiable curiosity" about how to make it (LP 597). He has no ability to occupy the position as an information provider nor as an income provider on the production of sausages. Their visit to the sausage farm results in debasing his authority. Considering sausage is slang for phallus, the decline of its quality should be associated with that of Jason's paternal authority. Jason realizes that he has lost "Jo's respect for the all-wise, all-just, all-providing" (LP 599). He is more and more declining in power from this time on and in the process, his feeling of impotence is intensified through his contact with those who are connected with food, such as "the grocer's wife" (LP 599) and a labor agitator in a "meat market" (LP 601).

Finally comes "the black day when he crack[s]" (LP 599). On that day Jason is forced to pawn tableware. He mumbles to the pawnbroker "with a shamed face": "Table silver. Some goblets that have been long time —' He broke off — the indignity was intolerable —'and a coffee set'" (LP 600). The deprivation of tableware, food utensils, seems to be a fatal blow to him as a patriarch. As soon as he parts with them, his family heads straight down the road to crack-up: Mrs. Davis's illness is diagnosed as incurable and Jo is dismissed from school for some unexplained misdemeanor. After her return Jason offers to educate Jo as her "private tutor" for a while because he has "lots of time" as a result of the bad slump in business (LP 602). Jo makes fun of his conceit, saying "You fancy yourself

as a teacher" (LP 603). He sets out to tutor her in Latin and mathematics that night, yet he soon betrays his incompetence and their roles get reversed in the end:

Jason said, "There's always for the X an unknown quantity. You have to have some system — haven't you?"

"Swell system."

"Got to start somewhere." He bent over it again: "If the government revenue increased from five billions in 1927 to —"

He was temporarily at the end of resources.

"Darling," he said. "In a week I'll know more about this —"

"Yes, Daddy." (LP 604)

Jo gains superiority and behaves like his educator. At this point Jason ends study by saying "Time for you to go to bed." He attempts to impose his standards on Jo and control her so as to recover his authority. There seems to be a nuance of incestuous seduction in his words, "go to bed," that creates "a *pregnant* silence between them" (LP 604; emphasis added). Then she replies to him: "I know." She came over to him and pecked briefly at an old baseball scar on his forehead" (LP 604). Her remark, "I know," signifies her will to act not according to his directions but on her own initiative. And only "briefly" she gives him a well aimed kiss at "an old baseball scar," a symbol of his childhood, which is associated with a childish, helpless state of Jason at present. In this scene their positions are entirely reversed, and hereafter Jo acts as the mainstay and saves her family from crack-up.

The following day Jason's prospective customer, Mr. Halklite, calls by appointment at the Davis home. Nevertheless, Jason is sound asleep and never leaves his bed. In his stead Jo receives Halklite. As he converses with her, Halklite is so

impressed by her sagacity and thoughtfulness that he changes the form of address from "Mr. Davis' little girl" to "young lady." It is at the moment when he hears about Jo's linguistic ability, and not Jason's, that he decides to award her father a large business contract:

"You speak French?" [Halklite said.]

She regretted that she had mentioned it, but she admitted, "I grew up in France."

"So did your daddy, didn't he?"

"Oh no, Daddy's very American. He can't even speak French much, really."

Halklite stood up, made his decision suddenly, perhaps irrationally. (LP 606)

Jo saves the day by aiding her father to land the contract which restores him to financial stability. Since she has become the pillar of her family, all crises are resolved one after another and the family makes a dramatic recovery from the verge of crack-up: with the sausage restored to its former quality, the farm begins to show a profit; Jo's expulsion is lifted when the school discovers it erred; Mrs. Davis makes unforeseen progress and may shortly return home.

There is a symbolic significance in the final scene. Jo has achieved maturity and wisdom which she expresses through an analogy between the Davis's lives and those of peacocks she and Jason see in the zoo: "We were peacocks once, weren't we. . . . Maybe some day we'll be three peacocks again" (LP 607). Then she tries to feed one of the peacocks that she compared to her family. The story, which begins with Jason's providing her with lunch, ends with her saying in triumph, "Look, Daddy! I've got this one eating the popcorn!" (LP 607).

#### IV. The Suppression of the Daughters

As we have seen so far, the daughters in both stories are in-subordinate to their respective fathers who desire to control them. Each gains the superiority over her father, yet it has been obscured through a different form of suppression from the other.

As for Honoria, we must remember, she has not only her real father Charlie but also her surrogate father Lincoln in the text. Unlike Charlie, Lincoln is an authoritative patriarch and can control Honoria as well as his own children in his house. In the climactic scene we witness Lincoln "swinging Honoria back and forth like a pendulum from side to side" just before he orders children to dine (BR 646). This action is visual testimony that she is a puppet in the hands of Lincoln. It is Honoria confined within the Peters home where she behaves as a docile "little girl" that the reader sees in the greater part of the story. Even when she is going out with Charlie, she cannot entirely escape from Lincoln's influence. Charlie mentions Lincoln once in the lunch scene:

Cautiously and casually he asked: "And Aunt Marion and Uncle Lincoln — which do you like best?"

"Oh, Uncle Lincoln, I guess."

He was increasingly aware of her presence. As they came in, a murmur of "... adorable" followed them, and now the people at the next table bent all their silences upon her, staring as if she were no more conscious than a flower. (LP 637).

Honoria has clearly expressed herself, yet no sooner does she approve Lincoln than she becomes quiet and so appears "no more conscious than a flower," as if uttering a name to conjure with, she metamorphosed into mere pretty floral

decoration on the table. Charlie does not become well aware of her presence until she lapses into silence. Honoria's superiority over her real father is suppressed and obscured under the authority of her surrogate father in the text.

Jo's power, which she freely displays in the text, was suppressed, in other words, expunged from the story. "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" appeared in print for the first time in the September 1971 issue of *Esquire* magazine, about thirty years after the death of the author. What appears in *Esquire* is not Fitzgerald's complete story, for it lacks the last six pages of the original, the very parts that center on Jo's activity. *Esquire* claims that it was not allowed to publish the story in its complete form. Apparently when faced with the possibility of having no Fitzgerald story at all, *Esquire* chose to truncate the story arbitrarily. In the following year Atkinson published a negative comment on the *Esquire* version:

This version shifts the focus much more strongly to [Jason] Davis and lessens the importance of the father-daughter relationship. In addition, by lopping off the last six pages of the typescript, *Esquire* has omitted the coda ending of the story which gives the story its title.

(Atkinson 284)

In marked contrast to the ending of the original version which shows Jo's positive stance, the *Esquire* version ends with focusing on Jason in a helpless state. *Esquire* did not find it necessary to inform its readers that they were getting an expurgated version of the story. It is probably because *Esquire* assumed that the author was "clearly more interested in the problems of middle-aged failure and survival," just like Prigozy mentioned in the beginning of my essay, and so regarded this version as fully satisfying. Such assumption

derives from the still dominant views that Fitzgerald's work is a close reflection of his real life and that a male protagonist is always his alter ego. Fitzgerald wrote "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" in 1935 during the desperate crack-up period when he also published the "Crack-up" essays in *Esquire*, the confessional essays about his own mental and psychological breakdown in the 1930s. Both Prigozy and *Esquire* identify the decline of Jason with that of the author at the time and place a higher value on his description of its process. As a result, Jo's animation is either expunged or criticized as unnecessary for the tragedy of the father.

The important thing, however, is that we can still read the daughters' powers into the texts in spite of the fact they are suppressed. We must shed light on their obscured powers and appreciate them properly. By doing so, it comes out that Fitzgerald is not solely on the side of his male characters. The attempt to clarify their powers is of significance in Fitzgerald studies that stand in great need of reconsideration of his female characters. Fryer aptly defends Fitzgerald's treatment of them: "F. Scott Fitzgerald, often viewed as extremely unsympathetic toward his female characters, deserves reconsideration, for his women invariably embody ideals of self-realization" (Fryer 325). Two little women in "Babylon Rvisited" and "Lo, the Poor Peacock!" try to escape from the control of their fathers and are going toward the threshold of self-realization. In his subtle way Fitzgerald describes this as well as the fathers' disillusion.

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