Ah Love! Could thou and I with Fate conspire
To grasp this sorry Scheme of Things entire,
Would not we shatter it to bits -- and then
Re-mould it nearer to the Heart's Desire.
(Edward Fitzgerald)
Fitzgerald seeks to explore and lay bare the areas of social experience which were of immense interest and concern to his age. He projected his society's principal preoccupations and defined its hopes, aspirations and dreams. Money and material possessions had helped change the fundamental notions of man, his place and predicament in society. As an invasive force, money had stretched its tentacles far and wide, and had gone so far as to affect modes and manners of the epoch, and shape its aesthetic sensibility as also its cultural responses.

The psychological implications of money as the terrifying fiscal strength in the post-war American social and moral ethos, became the most powerful and potent cultural determinant and drew all and sundry into the vortex of a peculiar pursuit, flippancy, flirtation, delectation and dissipation. As an intensely sensitive human barometer, recording social tremors and reflecting changing complexions of contemporary American society, Fitzgerald responded passionately to the spectacle of transformation, revealing life in a rapid Kaleidoscope. As a consequence, he could not remain detached and disengaged from the profound social and cultural concerns of his age. Nor could he afford to be
indifferent to the society which formed the very fountain-spring of his inspiration and the very material of his art with which he wove the delicate fabric of his novels. It is in his symbolism of money that Fitzgerald found a vitally significant and efficacious instrument for gauging as well as reflecting the transfiguration of the American social and cultural life that catalyzed the Twenties in the wake of the unprecedented on-rush of enormous wealth.

It is historically borne out that during this period, money had assumed social and moral dimensions hitherto unheard of and unforeseen. The possession of fabulous wealth, or its absence, marked off and determined socio-ethical values by conferring status, power and prestige, and investing the possessor with a distinctive lustre. This was accomplished by putting special premium on American life of such commitments to old graces and the grandeur of the warm, old vanished world as would lend new complexions of meaning and insight. Jay Gatsby, for instance, contrives his untiring illusions to retrieve that world to make the past repeat itself. But like the America that he symbolises, he succeeds only in being subsumed by the allurements of the corrosive and corrupting wealth. The undiminished moral and spiritual desiccation by immense and easy money is also the meaning of fate in *Tender Is The Night* and *The Last Tycoon*: Dick Diver fails to cope with the bewitching enticements of Nicole's
money and is ravished by the Warren wealth which dissipates his healing power that his society needed for its own normalcy and rejuvenation. It is money that cripples Monroe Stahr's talent to create illusions that wealth alone can generate; but he too ends up as its helpless and hapless victim.

Money in its callous enormity became the equivalent, quid pro quo, an alternative, replacement, a metaphysical substitute for what were once the cardinal social and moral values -- truth, beauty, goodness -- of the inherited legacy of the aristocracy of wealth and worth, and its attendant privileges and prerequisites. Fitzgerald took upon himself the responsibility of being the national conscience of America, the moral Messiah to recommend a healing balm, a panacea, for the moral and social salvation of a generation deprived of its spiritual moorings, floundering on a rudderless boat, desperate to be rowed to a safe destination, a secure haven for disembarkation. His artistic quest was the spiritual voyage of discovery of an El Dorado of imagination where man's weary soul might find solace and where his frayed nerves might be soothed and assuaged. But his generation, tantalised by the blandishments of wealth, failed to realise that behind the facade of well-contrived social niceties and social charm lay a deeper sharper, and a more penetrating premonition and prophetic vision of what
would overwhelm American hopes and aspirations within those post-war decades. His age, strangely enough, though cajoled and pampered by his golden dreams and illusions, failed to heed the warning voice of its "last Laocoon" that would continue to reverberate through the pages of his novels.

The stark realities of money in the industrial, urban American society entailed gigantic, extended horizons of materialism, resulting in a precarious imbalance of material gains and moral decay. The implications of money had a debilitating and pernicious impact on that society, so much so that it was terrible to contemplate the pervasive corruption and exploitation resultant upon the possession of big money and the trail of evil consequences it left behind in different spheres of life, social, economic, cultural and moral. In *The Great Gatsby*, gilded corruption hidden in tainted money is given rosy colours to sustain Gatsby's inexhaustible capacity for hope and unwearying illusions; but he survives as the least corruptible in a world of moneyed evil where everyone is defiled, desecrated and blinded by the foul dust that floats about in the ambience of putrefying wealth. In *The Beautiful and Damned* expectations of excessive wealth lead to abandoning of all responsible conduct and crumbling of moral barriers. What could provide ethical sanctions for Anthony Patch's dereliction of social
propriety is wealth with noblesse oblige and moral accountability.

Money which is so much needed for smooth commerce, almost invariably failed to become an endorsement for personal happiness and social respectability. Instead it succeeded in creating a yawning gap, as it were, between the sharing of multiplying wealth and its extending avenues for consumption, on the one hand, and the ameliorative and beneficent use it could be put to for the moral good of society, on the other. But the accruing advantages of money inescapably leaned towards what depraves and demoralises rather than what is promotive of virtue and excellence. What came as the intervening force in the hiatus was man's lust for domination through possession of mammoth wealth which became a new mode of experiencing and wielding power that money alone could bestow.

The liquid flow of money sought newer and more seductive ways of breeding evil and polluting social climate, even to the extent of entailing ecological imbalances. The big centres of metropolitan commercial culture have been invariably the hotbeds of seething corruption and seduction through wealth. In This Side of Paradise and The Beautiful and Damned, it is New York which forms the very source from
which emanates all that is vicious and vile in wealth. The haunts of lustful ventures and carnal orgies and such attendant vices as are nourished and sustained by easy and misbegotten wealth. This urban business would supplant the quieter, idyllic and a more virtuous world of rural innocence, though the metropolitan sophistication would decry such pastoral agrarian backwaters as uncouth remote wilderness, still unaffected by the ever expanding virus of vitiated wealth. In other words, the tainted money served to pander to the baser passions, and set in motion the cycle of moral degeneration, for as is true in most cases, big money is symbolically sex gone wild which no amount of apologies could conceal or explain away.

This is also Fitzgerald's Mid-West which Nick Carraway extols so eloquently in The Great Gatsby and to which all the characters belong. They all go "East" which is the centre of not only immense riches but also of great social prestige and political power, New York once again, the symbolic centre of the American dream of money as the myth of success. But the disillusioning impact of money in the East makes everyone go West to the old, vanishing world where unspoilèd virtue lingers still as a graceful way of life. In Tender Is The Night the European Riviera beaches become a substitute for New York in the symbolic role and function they perform; the Americans in Europe with their
new world wealth contaminating the old hierarchy of values still intact and uncorrupted, though not unresponsive to the new excitements of American wealth.

In *The Last Tycoon* the area shifts further West to the last post of the resilient American frontier. It is Hollywood, the centre of motion picture industry, the new focus and meteor of the American dream. It is the mythical world in which the legend of fabulous wealth and the illusions it could energise finds its gorgeous echo. The East is now bald and barren. What the East had brutalised and annihilated the pioneering West must materialise and fulfil, the promise and possibility of the dream. In Fitzgerald's imagination the ecological regions pertain to specific areas of experience of American social and psychological reality. Such identifiable moral and spiritual contours of America have found their scathing portrayal through the symbolism of money.

The picture of money that emerges from Fitzgerald's novels has several levels of heights and depths. It serves to point to the index of the class of American rich that the novelist endeavours to fictionalise in terms of ruthless social truth. Such a coherent social order is an essential precondition to the character's social habitat in which he is an involved, responsible being, and in which context, all
the aspects of life in the specifics of that society are readjusted and reassessed. What Fitzgerald accomplishes is the meaningful coalescence of the self and society, an extension and elevation of the self on to a higher plane. It is to bring home the relevance that individual characters are shaped by what constitutes an age, the milieu and the moment and that the social mores and manners mould and determine the involutions of the inner life of the characters. In turn, through an inward revelation, the characters unravel the skein of internal disorders and spiritual malaise of that society. This interaction has urged the writer to put his diagnosing finger on the pulse of the age, the very source of its cancerous disease, what contaminates and poisons the stream of life; what defiles and debases individuals promiscuously and ruthlessly.

This was a generation that had gone out of hand. Elders had lost credibility and therefore rather than losing self respect they decided to dance to the tune of their children. Three sets of elders are mentioned in the novels: mothers and fathers -- Amory Blaine's mother who insists on being called Beatrice, Rosalind's mother who encourages her rather than deters her, and Gloria's mother who is exasperated but helpless with her daughter, "a connoisseur of kisses"; Nicole's father who seduced her, Cecilia's father whose naked Secretary tumbles out of the wardrobe in her presence,
Gatsby's father who hopes his son would conquer new worlds; all of them are hardly role models. The second set comprises Anthony's grandfather for whom the grandson has no respect and who rejects his idle ways and disinherits him. The third set has Monsignor Darcy who doesn't reprimand or advise because he knows it would only increase rebelliousness, but his actions speak louder than words so Amory finds a meaning in life by serving others as Monsignor had done.

A greater galaxy of women have been presented in the short stories and their multi-faceted personalities have been highlighted: beloveds, wives, mothers, mistresses and professionals. In the novels they are presented only as beloveds, wives and mistresses. No wonder then that they were lost in the illusion of "young romantic love to which women look forever forward and forever back." In such a world, a wife doesn't want to be called a wife; she prefers "mistress" because the wife is "such an ugly word". Motherhood too was "a crowning indignity". Marriage itself was not very palatable because it was associated with "responsibility and a lot of children", and this was a class that revelled in eat, drink and be merry; they were an "abandoned" set of young men and women. There is no woman that can uplift the men, no woman of character, no professional as we have in the short stories.
Obviously, there's no time for religion. Though Catholicism, Bilphism and even Nirvana are mentioned, and Monsignor Darcy, the priest is idealised but the emerging picture is of relapse and "all Gods dead" except Mammon. Its almost a cynic's presentation: Chevalier O'Keefe had one weakness -- women, "he was enormously susceptible to all sorts and conditions of women..... He was made utterly miserable for twenty years by a series of women who hated him, used him, bored him, aggravated him, sickened him, spent his money, made a fool of him -- in brief, as the world has it, loved him."¹ He decided to "rescue himself from all these drains" so joined the St. Voltaire's monastery and entered the Tower of Chastity. As he gazed at the winding road, vineyards, fields and trees, he saw a peasant girl, Therese adjust her garter. He leaned so far out that when a stone broke loose he fell head over heels and broke his neck and vows. Being suspected of suicide, he was not buried but tumbled into the field "where he improved the soil for many years afterwards". They became adept at fooling the deity, and prayed immediately after all crimes "until eventually prayer and crime became indistinguishable." If a safe fell on them, they cried, "My God" thinking that was proof that belief was rooted deep in the human breast.

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Socialism was thought to be a panacea but in vain. Though it was characteristic of the Jazz Age that it had no interest in politics but there is cynicism regarding that too:

The litter of that incredible pigsty....
Those glorified proletarians babbling blandly to the nation the ideas of high school seniors! Little men with copybook ambitions who by mediocrity had thought to emerge from mediocrity into the lustreless and unromantic heaven of a government by the people -- and the best, the dozen shrewd men at the top, egotistical and cynical, were content to lead this choir of white ties and wire collar buttons in a discordant and amazing hymn, compounded of a vague confusion between wealth as a reward of virtue and wealth as a proof of vice, and continued cheers for God, the Constitution, and The Rocky Mountains. 

Sneer became the highest form of expression in "this land of Jazz" being born into which implied a "state of almost audible confusion." Fitzgerald was no exception to this

2. Ibid., p.56.
rowdy lot and lived intensely the life of his times; at the same time, he was its greatest critic.

The fungus-growth of moral and social decay and degeneration is concealed beneath the facade the rosy, beguiling appearances of money as an economic reality, unfolding its sinister ramifications through symbolic manifestations. This was Fitzgerald's profound concern, as a serious social novelist. He functioned in his exclusive metier, as an artist, and in the particular social context of a distinctive American era that chastened and disciplined his sensibility to fathom his society -- not in the scintillating luminosity of money, the sheen and shimmer of its golden haze in which the age basked and buried its despairing sense of futility -- but in the rampant and raging corruption and corrupting powers of money in his contemporary society. He exercised an artist's severe critical objectivity in probing and plummeting the deeply flawed contemporary reality, and with a moralist's censure he indicted the age with an unrelenting disapprobation. It is thus in his theme of money that Fitzgerald adopts a different attitude to his social themes, more discriminating than that of his contemporaries, money not as a social fact, but money in its extended possibilities of social and cultural implications, wealth in its winding mazes stretching into all shades and complexes of post-industrial,
American affluent society in the inter-war period. This forms the very crux that determines the meaning and relevance of his social vision as well as the intrinsic worth and viable integrity of his art.

The American society during the Twenties and Thirties was in the throes of a tremendous social and moral crisis created by the emergence of enormous wealth with all its alluring and exciting possibilities: "The exclusive worship of the bitch-goddess success is our material disease." It has assumed mythical proportions and was "detached both from its material basis and from its human origins [and taken on] the power of infinite self-multiplication". It was desired and coveted by the good and the internal characters turning them into objects identified with money; they became dehumanised and depersonalised and could be inter-changed or bartered away. In an acquisitive society the see-saw struggle for supremacy leads to conflicts and attempts to annihilate others through betrayals; man begins to live a masked existence, in concealing nefarious designs through misleading surfaces where others can be dodged and allured into subjugation and surrender. However, his characters are in the hands of a malicious inexplicable evil, and fall victims to it but are broken not defeated. The age needed an artist, an apostle, a spokesman who could help the nation attain its emancipation. Fitzgerald stands in the vanguard
of the phalanx of novelists of the period who endeavoured to portray the socio-cultural scene with fervour. His view that evil emanated from the prevailing social system, unlike the existentialists who sought to establish that man is an isolated individual in an indifferent and hostile universe responsible for his own actions and to choose his own destiny, made him the foremost social thinker and artist of his age. The symbolism of money demonstrates Fitzgerald's belief that man gets into the maelstrom of social and economic evils by resorting to devious means to scramble up the social ladder. This in turn contaminates the environment, the entire psychological and moral ambience of an age that sinks into decadence and renders the ethos inconducive to the growth and development of those eternal verities and values that alone make social and moral excellence in life a worthy pursuit. This brings to mind W.B. Yeats:

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity. 3