

## Section 1

*This Side of Paradise, the first novel by American author F. Scott Fitzgerald, appeared in 1920 and was an immediate success. Fitzgerald captured the cynicism, doubt, and disillusionment that followed World War I. How does the main character, Amory Blaine, feel that the war affected his generation?*

“Why shouldn’t you be bored,” yawned Tom. “Isn’t that the conventional frame of mind for the young man of your age and condition?”

“Yes,” said Amory speculatively, “but I’m more than bored; I am restless.”

“Love and war did for you.”

“Well,” Amory considered, “I’m not sure that the war itself had any great effect on either you or me—but it certainly ruined the old backgrounds, sort of killed individualism out of our generation.”

Tom looked up in surprise.

“Yes it did,” insisted Amory. “I’m not sure it didn’t kill it out of the whole world. Oh, Lord, what a pleasure it used to be to dream I might be a really great dictator or writer or religious or political leader—and now even a Leonardo da Vinci or Lorenzo de Medici couldn’t be a real old-fashioned bolt in the world. Life is too huge and complex. The world is so overgrown that it can’t lift its own fingers, and I was planning to be such an important finger—”

“I don’t agree with you,” Tom interrupted.

“There never were men placed in such egotistic positions since—oh, since the French Revolution.”

Amory disagreed violently.

“You’re mistaking this period when every nut is an individualist for a period of individualism. Wilson has only been powerful when he has represented; he’s had to compromise over and over again. Just as soon as Trotsky and Lenin take a definite, consistent stand they’ll become two-minute figures like Kerensky.<sup>1</sup> Even Foch<sup>2</sup> hasn’t half the significance of Stonewall Jackson.<sup>3</sup> War used to be the most individualistic pursuit of man, and yet the popular heroes of the war had neither authority nor responsibility: Guynemer and Sergeant York.<sup>4</sup> How could a schoolboy make a hero of Pershing<sup>5</sup>? A big man has no time really to do anything but just sit and be big.”

“Then you don’t think there will be any more permanent world heroes?”

“Yes—in history—not in life. Carlyle<sup>6</sup> would

have difficulty getting material for a new chapter on ‘The Hero as a Big Man.’”

“Go on. I’m a good listener to-day.”

“People try so hard to believe in leaders now, pitifully hard. But we no sooner get a popular reformer or politician or soldier or writer or philosopher—a Roosevelt, a Tolstoi, a Wood, a Shaw, a Nietzsche, than the cross-currents of criticism wash him away. My Lord, no man can stand prominence these days. It’s the surest path to obscurity. People get sick of hearing the same name over and over.”

“Then you blame it on the press?”

“Absolutely. Look at you; you’re on The New Democracy, considered the most brilliant weekly in the country, read by the men who do things and all that. What’s your business? Why, to be as clever, as interesting, and as brilliantly cynical as possible about every man, doctrine, book, or policy that is assigned you to deal with. The more strong lights, the more spiritual scandal you can throw on the matter, the more money they pay you, the more the people buy the issue. You, Tom d’Inwilliers, a blighted Shelley<sup>7</sup>, changing, shifting, clever, unscrupulous, represent the critical consciousness of the race. . . .

### Footnotes

1. **Kerensky:** Russian revolutionary.
2. **Foch:** World War I Commander in Chief.
3. **Stonewall Jackson:** U.S. Civil War general.
4. **Sergeant York:** American World War I hero.
5. **Pershing:** commander of U.S. forces during World War I.
6. **Carlyle:** British historian and essayist.
7. **Shelley:** English romantic poet.

### Discussion Questions

#### Clarifying

1. What is Amory Blaine’s opinion about how World War I affected his generation?
2. What dreams did Amory have before the war?
3. **Making Inferences** Amory insists that the war did not have a great effect on him. Do you agree? Why or why not?