This Side of Paradise:

The Marxist Theory

F. Scott Fitzgerald allows his character Armory to explore the definition of class lines in his novel *This Side of Paradise* (1948). Armory is a boy growing into a man through the course of this novel and as he experiences college and the “real world” he strives to find his place. Armory is convinced that the way society is divided into classes is imperative and that he is destined to be at the top.

Armory grew up with a father who was very subdued and stayed mostly in the background of Armory’s life and a mother who influenced his entire existence from the time of his birth until he went off to boarding school as an early teenager. His mother was a socialite who came from a wealthy family and thanks to this Armory grew up with a very high opinion of himself and his status in society. As a child he had few friends and children his age rarely liked him for long periods of time. Armory was not particularly upset by this because he has been taught that they are simply jealous of his advanced social status. When invited to a birthday party for a girl whom he had a crush on he deliberately turned up on her doorstep thirty minutes late because he thought it the fashionable thing to do. In order to be impressive he decided that, “Then he would shake hands, using that slight, half-foreign bow” for it seemed the most proper and appropriate thing due to his social status (Fitzgerald 10). Every move that Armory made was made after due thought over how it would reflect upon his social status and with every consideration of how it could improve that status.

After a few years of attending a prep school, St. Regis’s Preparatory, Armory develops two classifications for his peers, The Slicker and The Big Man. The Slicker was a title to covet for The Slicker is able to navigate social situations with the slightest of ease, he excels in everything he attempts, for he only attempts those things he excels, and is very successful. On the other hand The Big Man is a person who strives to become a Slicker but never quite achieves it largely because of too much effort. He struggles to perform well in social situations, feels the need to try everything and as a result fails to succeed in any of them and is unsuccessful. Armory spends his entire time at St. Regis’ making sure he is The Slicker, making sure that the other boys look up to him and want to be like him.

When Armory graduates from his prep school he advances to Princeton because he believes that it is the best university despite the fact that no one else from St. Regis’ will be attending with him. He realizes once he gets there that it is more difficult to be The Slicker in college and slowly those definitions fade away and he struggles to find exactly where he fits. He complains one day to his friend, “I know I’m not a regular fellow, yet I loathe anybody that isn’t” (47). He spends his time with his friends, discussing great literature and trying to imagine great and new ideas. He thinks himself above all the other young men around him with few exceptions and because of this he goes around with a very superior air that others seem to just accept and ignore. He allowed clubs and groups to come recruit him and made sure that they all knew that he was helping them by joining, not the other way around. He also made sure that all the clubs he joined would enhance his social position for it was truly the only thing he cared for, the only thing he desired was to be on the top of the social ladder.