
The power of money in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*: An Alvin Toffler perspective

Eka Harisma W.^{1*}, Nina Sulistyowati²

¹Universitas Islam Negeri Walisongo Semarang, Indonesia

²Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: eka.harisma@walisongo.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Of Mice and Men is one of John Steinbeck's novellas that describe the situation and condition of the great depression of American in 1930s. The novel portrays the lives of working-class men, particularly the main characters George, Lennie, and Curley. This study aims to explore the power of money in *Of Mice and Men* by employing an extrinsic approach that connects literary analysis with social thought, particularly Alvin Toffler's theory of power dynamics. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method within the field of literary studies. The data are collected from the novel *Of Mice and Men* as the primary source, focusing on dialogues, narrative descriptions, and character interactions related to economic conditions. Data collection is conducted through close reading and note-taking techniques. Furthermore, the data are analyzed using an interpretative method by applying Toffler's theory of power to identify how money functions as a source of power, control, and inequality within the story. By examining the characters' economic struggles and aspirations, this study reveals how wealth, as represented by money, shapes relationships, opportunities, and social hierarchies. Using Toffler's perspective, this study analyzes the depiction of economic dependency and powerlessness during the Great Depression. The findings show that money functions in three significant ways: (1) as a source of hope for laboring characters, (2) as a tool of control and domination exercised by capital owners over workers, and (3) as a symbol of social and economic inequality.

Keywords: Great depression, extrinsic approach, power of money, theory of power dynamic

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INTRODUCTION

John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men* is widely regarded as one of the most influential literary works depicting the realities of the American Dream during the Great Depression. The economic crisis that struck the United States following the stock market crash of 1929 brought profound changes to American society. Beyond causing widespread unemployment and poverty, the Depression reshaped social relations and exposed deep inequalities between those who controlled economic resources and those who struggled merely to survive (Galbraith, 2009; Kennedy, 1999). For many Americans, economic hardship was not only a financial issue but also a social experience that affected their sense of security, dignity, and future aspirations. These conditions became an important concern for American writers of the period, many of whom sought to portray the human consequences of economic instability and social injustice through their literary works (Shillinglaw, 2021). Among them, John Steinbeck gained recognition for his realistic portrayal of marginalized individuals whose lives were shaped by poverty, uncertainty, and unequal power relations (Jones, 2021). Rather than presenting economic issues as abstract concepts, Steinbeck illustrates how economic conditions directly influence everyday interactions, opportunities, and social status. This concern is particularly evident in *Of Mice and Men*, a novella that follows the lives of migrant ranch workers struggling to achieve economic security in an environment marked by limited opportunities and unequal access to power. Through the experiences of

its characters, the novel reveals how economic power operates not only as a material force but also as a mechanism that shapes social relationships and reinforces existing hierarchies within society. Such representations make *Of Mice and Men* by Steinbeck a valuable text for examining the connection between economic power and social inequality in Depression-era America.

During the Great Depression, many tenant farmers lost their land and homes as a result of exploitation by industrial capitalists and financial institutions. Forced to leave their native places, they became migrant workers who relied on temporary jobs and moved from one ranch to another in search of employment. Life in the 1930s was marked by severe poverty and a constant struggle for survival. Under these circumstances, many workers dreamed of owning a piece of land where they could grow crops, raise livestock, and build a home that would provide security and stability for their families (Meng & Liu, 2018). This social reality is reflected in *Of Mice and Men*, particularly through the characters of George and Lennie, whose shared dream of owning land symbolizes the aspirations of many displaced workers during the Great Depression.

Steinbeck depicts a harsh socio-economic reality in which poor workers struggle to survive and seek financial security. The novel's major themes include the American Dream reflected in the desire to own land or wealth, powerlessness, social isolation, and human relationships, culminating in personal failure and persistently unfulfilled economic hopes. George and Lennie share the dream of owning their own land, which implicitly symbolizes freedom from the economic pressures and dependence on money within the capitalist social structure of the Depression era. Steinbeck's concern with the lives of working-class Americans is closely reflected in *Of Mice and Men*. Often associated with social realism, Steinbeck consistently portrays individuals whose lives are shaped by economic hardship, unstable employment, and unequal social structures (Straumann, 1965; Meng & Liu, 2018). Published in 1937, the novella centers on George Milton and Lennie Small, two migrant ranch workers who move from one temporary job to another while pursuing a shared dream of owning a small piece of land. Although this dream represents hope for economic independence, it is continuously challenged by the realities of poverty and the unequal distribution of resources within the society they inhabit. Throughout the narrative, Steinbeck depicts a social environment in which access to employment, authority, and material resources determines an individual's position within the social hierarchy. Consequently, the novel not only narrates the personal struggles of its characters but also reveals how economic power influences social relationships, shapes opportunities, and sustains patterns of inequality among different groups of people.

The relationship between literature and society has long been a central concern in literary studies. Literature is often regarded as a representation of human life and social reality because literary texts emerge from particular historical and cultural contexts (Wellek & Warren, 1949). From a Marxist perspective, literary works do not merely depict individual experiences but also reveal broader social structures, including economic relations and class dynamics that shape everyday life (Lukács, 1971). Similarly, literature is inseparable from the cultural and material conditions of the society in which it is produced (Williams, 1977). Consequently, literary texts can serve as valuable sources for understanding how power, inequality, and social relations operate within a particular historical moment. Recent studies have further demonstrated that literature can expose various forms of social inequality and power relations while simultaneously contributing to the construction of cultural meanings and public understanding (Akhter, 2020). In addition, literary works may contribute to shaping public attitudes and cultural understanding, demonstrating that literature functions not only as a reflection of reality but also as a force that participates in the construction of social meaning (Annet, 2025).

Within this framework, economic resources play an important role in shaping social relations and social hierarchies within *Of Mice and Men*. In social life, money is often associated not only with economic transactions but also with status, prestige, security, influence, and access to power (Jacobs, Garry & Slaus, 2012). Beyond its function as a medium of exchange, money may serve as a social resource that enables individuals and groups to exercise influence over others and secure advantageous positions within society (Dodd, 2014; Simmel, 2004). From this perspective, money can be understood as a form of power because it affects social opportunities, determines access to resources, and shapes relationships among individuals. This conceptual framework provides a useful basis for examining how

economic resources influence the social dynamics and power relations represented in Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

The significance of economic power can be observed through several characters in the novel. George and Lennie, as migrant laborers, occupy a vulnerable position because they possess neither property nor economic security. Their dependence on temporary employment limits their autonomy and shapes many of their life choices. In contrast, characters such as the Boss and Curley derive authority from their control over jobs, wages, and working conditions. Meanwhile, Candy and Crooks experience different forms of marginalization associated with age, disability, and race, which are further intensified by their economic circumstances. Through these contrasting positions, Steinbeck illustrates how access to economic resources contributes to the formation of social hierarchies and power relations within the ranch community.

To examine the relationship between economic resources and social hierarchy in *Of Mice and Men*, this study employs Alvin Toffler's theory of power. Toffler, an American futurologist and cultural sociologist, developed the concept of the power triad, the combination of knowledge, wealth, and violence as sources of power in modern society. In his work, *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century* (Toffler, 1990), Toffler asserted that wealth (including money) plays a significant role as a flexible form of power, capable of being used to strengthen social power and even transformed into other forms of power (e.g., knowledge or physical strength). He argues that power in modern society no longer relies primarily on violence or wealth, but on knowledge as the most flexible and democratic source of power. In *Powershift*, he categorizes power into three source, violence, wealth, and knowledge and emphasizes that knowledge enables control over both economic resources and coercive force. This shift marks a fundamental transformation in how power operates in contemporary societies, where control over information, meaning, and knowledge production becomes central. He emphasized that wealth, including money, plays a significant role as a flexible form of power, capable of being used to strengthen social power and even transform it into other forms of power. The power of money as a structural factor in the social system influences social power relations in the setting of *Of Mice and Men*, particularly in the context of the Great Depression, where money and economic opportunity are at the center of social conflict.

In his book *the Third Wave* Zakaria (2012), Toffler divides society into three different categories, namely the first wave is the society after the agrarian revolution and replaced the first hunter-gatherer culture. Society at this time placed muscle power as their power; The Second Wave is an industrial society and is based on mass production, mass distribution, mass consumption, mass education, mass media, mass recreation, mass entertainment, and weapons of mass destruction, combine with standardization, centralization, concentration, and synchronization, and the organizational style we call bureaucracy. Society at this time places capital or (money) as their power. In the industrial era, money is the power to rule. The more money someone has, the greater the power they have. The next wave is a future society where knowledge or (mind) is their power. Toffler considers knowledge as the highest quality power because it implies efficiency and is used to punish, reward, persuade, and change. As the highest quality source of power, knowledge is also the most important element of power and wealth.

Although Toffler wrote in the context of a post-industrial society in the late 20th century, his theoretical framework allows one to reconstruct the power of money as a structural factor in the social system that influences social power relations in Steinbeck's setting especially in the context of the Great Depression, where money and economic opportunity were at the center of social conflict. The integration of Toffler's ideas into this novel helps broaden the analysis of the theme of money from a mere economic motivation to an indicator of power structures. Money in *Of Mice and Men* is not simply a material necessity, but has implications for social status, individual freedom, and the societal power hierarchy, which can be explained through the lens of Toffler's power triad where wealth serves as a medium that enables or constrains other forms of power in society. This framework allows researchers to view Steinbeck's novel from a broader American cultural perspective, where economic systems and power structures interact to shape the lived experiences of lower-class workers.

This study is grounded in the need to integrate literary analysis with broader social thought by combining insights from literary studies and the sociology of literature. Such an interdisciplinary approach allows for a deeper understanding of how literary texts engage with social realities, particularly

in representing economic conditions and power relations. In this context, Alvin Toffler's theory of power is employed to examine how money functions not merely as an economic motive but also as a mechanism that shapes social structures and interpersonal relationships in Great Depression-era American society. By incorporating Toffler's perspective into literary analysis, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of how economic resources influence the lives, opportunities, and social positions of characters in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*.

Previous studies on *Of Mice and Men* have predominantly focused on themes such as the American Dream, marginalization, and social inequality. Agboh (2022) argues that Steinbeck exposes the illusion of the American Dream by demonstrating how structural inequalities prevent individuals from achieving economic success despite their hard work. Nikolić (2022) for example, examines power relations, popular culture, and the American Dream, emphasizing how marginalized characters negotiate unequal social structures. Meanwhile, Lawrence, (2020) focuses on the representation of disability through the character of Lennie and explores how the novel can be reinterpreted within contemporary discussions of inclusion and social justice. Similarly, Kombieni (2020) highlights the struggles of marginalized individuals and emphasizes the role of hope, friendship, and shared dreams in coping with economic hardship. Zhang (2023) examines conflicts related to class, race, and gender through the lens of realism, while Hussein & Abdullah (2019) focus on the experiences of migrant workers and the socio-economic conditions that shape their displacement. Alguzo (2024) interprets the novel as a critique of the American Dream, emphasizing the gap between aspiration and economic reality. More recently, Tayib & Hassan (2026) have shown that the novella portrays multiple forms of oppression, including those related to race, gender, and disability, within the socio-economic context of 1930s America. In addition, sociological and Marxist readings of Steinbeck's work have generally focused on class conflict, labor exploitation, and capitalist inequality as central concerns of the novella.

Despite these valuable contributions, limited attention has been given to the role of money itself as a form of power that structures social relations and reinforces inequality within the narrative. Existing studies tend to discuss economic hardship as a social condition or a consequence of capitalism, but they rarely examine how economic resources operate as instruments of control, dependency, and influence among individuals. Therefore, the novelty of this study lies not only in its application of Alvin Toffler's theory of power but also in its focus on money as a mechanism through which power is exercised and maintained in the novel. By analyzing the relationship between economic resources and social power, this study offers a perspective that extends beyond dominant discussions of the American Dream, marginalization, and social inequality in *Of Mice and Men*.

METHOD

This study employs an interpretive qualitative method within the framework of the sociology of literature. The material object of this research is *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, while the formal object focuses on the representation of economic power, particularly how money operates within the story's setting, as well as in the relationships and social hierarchies among the characters. This research applies a descriptive qualitative approach, emphasizing close reading and interpretive analysis of the text to uncover meanings related to the power of money as represented in the novel (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Based on this perspective, the study utilizes Alvin Toffler's theory of power as an analytical framework to examine how economic resources function as instruments of control, domination, and dependency within the narrative. The integration of Toffler's theory with the sociology of literature provides a comprehensive approach to understanding the dynamics of economic power in the novel, particularly in the context of the Great Depression.

The primary focus of this research is wealth (money) as a form of power that influences social relations, class structure, and control over other individuals. Powershift theory by Toffler is used to analyze how money functions as a tool of domination, inequality, and social control in the context of American society during the Great Depression, as depicted in the novel.

Data collection was conducted through close reading and note-taking techniques, which are commonly used in qualitative literary research (Bowen, 2009) with the following procedures: 1. reading the novel *Of Mice and Men* in its entirety; 2. analyzing the areas of power held by each character, especially the main character; 3. identifying parts of the text (dialogue, narrative, conflict) that demonstrate the role of money in the characters' lives; 4. noting important quotations that represent economic-based power relations; 5. grouping data based on themes of monetary power, such as

economic dependence, financial dreams, labor exploitation, and social marginalization, and 6. drawing conclusions from the analysis.

The data analysis technique used was interpretive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the following procedures: examining the areas of power held by each character, especially the main character in the novel; classifying data based on the forms of monetary power that appear in the novel, such as money as a source of hope or dreams, money as a tool of control and domination, and money as a symbol of social inequality; then analyzing the collected data using Toffler's thinking in his work, *Powershift*, specifically the concept of wealth as power; the results of the analysis were then linked to the socio-economic context of the United States during the Great Depression as the setting for the story; and then drawing conclusions from the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

This study finds that the power relations among characters in *Of Mice and Men* are strongly shaped by economic conditions during the Great Depression. Money emerges as a central factor that influences social hierarchy, interpersonal relationships, and access to opportunities. The finding is presented in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of the Role of Money as a Source of Power in *Of Mice and Men*

Theme	Character(s)	Evidence	Interpretation
Money as Hope	George, Lennie, Candy	Dream of owning land	Wealth represents freedom and economic security
Money as Control	Curley, The Boss	Control over jobs and wages	Economic resources create authority over workers
Money as Social Inequality	Crooks, Candy, Lennie	Marginalized social positions	Unequal access to resources reinforces power imbalance

Table above summarizes the major findings regarding the role of money as a source of power in *Of Mice and Men*. The findings reveal that money influences social relations in three interconnected ways. First, it functions as a source of hope, motivating characters such as George, Lennie, and Candy to pursue economic security through the dream of land ownership. Second, money operates as a tool of control, as characters that possess economic resources, particularly the Boss and Curley, exercise authority over workers who depend on wages for survival. Third, money reflects and reinforces social inequality, as economically vulnerable characters experience marginalization and limited opportunities. These patterns demonstrate that wealth functions not merely as an economic resource but also as a mechanism that shapes power relations and social hierarchy within the novel. These findings support Toffler's (1990) argument that wealth constitutes one of the primary sources of power in society. In the context of *Of Mice and Men*, economic resources influence not only material conditions but also social status, individual agency, and interpersonal relationships. The novel illustrates how unequal access to wealth creates dependency and reinforces existing social hierarchies, reflecting the broader socio-economic realities of the Great Depression.

Discussion

Building on these findings, the novel can be interpreted as a representation of power constructed through capitalist economic relations. As explained by Faruk, (2017), capitalism is a system in which industry, trade, and the means of production are controlled by those who possess capital, with the primary aim of maximizing profit. Within this framework, money becomes not only an economic instrument but also a mechanism of domination, control, and social dependency among characters. To further analyze these dynamics, this study applies Alvin Toffler's theory as presented in *Powershift: Knowledge, Wealth, and Violence at the Edge of the 21st Century*. Power is derived from three main sources: muscle (force), money (economic resources), and mind (knowledge or information) (Toffler, 1990). In the context of the novel, these forms of power can be identified in the ways characters interact, establish dominance, and negotiate their positions within social hierarchies. Thus, the analysis focuses on how these different sources of power are distributed among the characters, particularly the main characters, and how they shape patterns of domination and dependency throughout the narrative.

Power in Muscle (Force Power/Violence)

In *Of Mice and Men*, the character of Lennie Small can be understood as representing what Alvin Toffler defines as muscle power, or power derived from physical strength. Lennie's domain of power lies primarily in his extraordinary physical abilities. Steinbeck emphasizes Lennie's physical presence through vivid description: "...a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, and wide, sloping shoulders..." (Steinbeck, 1965: 1). This portrayal highlights Lennie's imposing body, marking him as physically dominant compared to other characters. His strength is further reinforced through George's description of his abilities:

"He's sure a hell of a good worker. Strong as a bull."

"He can do anything you tell him," said George. "He's a good skinner. He can rassel grain bags, drive a cultivator. He can do anything. Just give him a try."

"... He can put up a four hundred pound bale." (Steinbeck, 1965: 2).

These statements indicate that Lennie's value within the social and economic structure of the novel is largely based on his physical labor. His strength makes him a productive worker, aligning him with the demands of a capitalist system that prioritizes manual labor. However, Lennie's physical power is not accompanied by intellectual capacity. Steinbeck portrays his cognitive limitations through George's remark: "Oh! I ain't saying he's bright. He ain't" (Steinbeck, 1965: 2). This contrast between physical strength and limited intellectual ability creates an imbalance in Lennie's form of power. While he possesses significant force, he lacks the knowledge and awareness needed to control or direct it effectively. Lennie's dependence on George is further illustrated through his difficulty in remembering even simple instructions:

"So you forgot that awready, did you? I gotta tell you again, do I? Jesus Christ, you're a crazy bastard!"

"I forgot," Lennie said softly. "I tried not to forget. Honest to God I did, George."

"O.K—O.K. I'll tell ya again. I ain't got nothing to do. Might jus' as well spen' all my time tellin' you things and then you forget 'em, and I tell you again."

"Tried and tried," said Lennie, "but it didn't do no good. I remember about the rabbits, George." (Steinbeck, 1965: 1).

This recurring pattern shows that Lennie relies heavily on George not only for guidance but also for decision-making and survival. His power, therefore, remains incomplete and dependent. Rather than functioning as an independent agent, Lennie becomes vulnerable within the social structure. His physical strength can be directed and controlled by others, making him susceptible to exploitation.

In a capitalist context, Lennie represents a form of labor power that is highly productive yet lacks autonomy. His physical energy is valuable, but he does not have control over the outcomes of his work or the resources it generates. From Alvin Toffler's perspective, Lennie embodies force power without wealth or knowledge power. As a result, his position remains subordinate within the hierarchy of power relations. Thus, Lennie illustrates a paradox within the capitalist system: he contributes through physical labor, yet remains dependent and marginalized because he lacks access to economic resources and knowledge.

Rather than portraying Lennie solely as an unfortunate individual, Steinbeck situates him within the economic realities of the Great Depression, when physical labor was abundant but offered little security for migrant workers. Lennie's experience mirrors that of thousands of displaced ranch workers whose physical strength remained their only asset in a collapsing economy. Despite being capable of hard labor, they had little opportunity to accumulate wealth or improve their social position because employment was temporary and controlled by landowners. Steinbeck transforms this historical reality into Lennie's personal experience, allowing the novel to expose the unequal distribution of economic power during the Depression era. Viewed through Toffler's conception of power, Lennie's physical strength carries little influence because it is not accompanied by economic resources or knowledge. His dependence on ranch owners illustrates Toffler's argument that, in modern societies, wealth increasingly surpasses force as the dominant source of power. Seen from this perspective, Lennie is more than a tragic fictional character. He represents the thousands of migrant laborers whose productive capacity

sustained agricultural production while offering them neither economic security nor bargaining power. Steinbeck's portrayal therefore criticizes a capitalist system in which those who generate wealth are often excluded from possessing it.

Power in Money (Wealth Power/Economic Power)

In *Of Mice and Men*, Curley represents a form of power that is not grounded in physical strength or intellectual capacity, but in access to economic resources and inherited authority. As the son of the ranch owner, Curley occupies a privileged position within the social hierarchy, which allows him to exercise control over the workers despite lacking productive contribution. This structural advantage is evident in Carlson's remark: "He just don't give a damn. Won't ever get canned 'cause his old man's the boss." (Steinbeck, 1965: 2). This statement reveals that Curley's power is institutionally protected, meaning it does not depend on merit or performance. Within a capitalist labor system, job security and authority are typically tied to productivity; however, Curley bypasses this logic entirely. His position is secured by ownership and family ties, not by labor. This reflects a hierarchical structure in which economic capital determines authority.

From the perspective of Alvin Toffler, Curley embodies wealth power, where control is exercised through economic resources rather than force. Unlike Lennie, whose power is physical but unstable, Curley's power is systemic and legitimized, enabling him to dominate others without direct effort. Curley's tendency to provoke fights, particularly with physically larger men, should not be read merely as personal aggression. Instead, it reflects how economic power enables the performance of dominance. His behavior toward Lennie illustrates this dynamic: "... Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys. He's all the time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he's mad at them because he ain't a big guy. You see little guys like that, ain't you? Always scrappy?" (Steinbeck, 1965: 2). While this passage suggests personal insecurity, it also demonstrates how Curley compensates for his physical limitations through his social position. In other words, his authority does not come from strength, but from the system that protects him. This allows him to initiate conflict without fear of consequences—something the workers cannot afford to do.

From a sociological perspective, Curley represents a petty bourgeois figure within an agrarian capitalist structure. He does not produce labor, yet he participates in controlling those who do. His power is therefore derivative of ownership, not effort.

In Toffler's framework, this reflects a form of institutionalized wealth power, where economic control translates into social dominance. Curley's authority is not negotiated but assumed, illustrating how capitalism reproduces inequality by granting power to those who possess or inherit economic resources.

Thus, Curley's character demonstrates that power in the novel is not simply a matter of individual traits, but is deeply embedded in economic structures that privilege ownership over labor. His dominance over others reveals how wealth operates as a stable and enduring source of power within the narrative. Curley's authority appears to stem less from his personal qualities than from the economic position he inherits as the ranch owner's son. Although he is neither respected nor admired by the workers, few openly challenge his decisions. This imbalance suggests that ownership, rather than competence, determines who holds authority within the ranch. The historical context of the Great Depression helps explain why Curley's inherited authority remains largely unquestioned. During a period when unemployment was widespread and jobs were scarce, workers had little bargaining power against employers. Within such conditions, ownership became a more decisive source of power than individual capability, a pattern that closely aligns with Toffler's argument regarding the growing dominance of wealth over force. Curley's authority survives not because he earns the workers' respect but because the economic structure of the ranch leaves little room for resistance. Steinbeck therefore shifts the source of power away from individual capability toward ownership itself. This portrayal resonates with the historical conditions of the Great Depression, when economic insecurity strengthened employers' control over an increasingly vulnerable workforce.

Power in Mind (Knowledge Power)

In *Of Mice and Men*, George Milton exemplifies what Alvin Toffler terms mind power, the capacity to use knowledge, judgment, and strategy to navigate constraints and shape outcomes. Unlike characters whose power is rooted in force or inherited wealth, George's authority emerges from his

ability to think, plan, and decide. Steinbeck introduces George as “small and quick, with a dark face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, and a thin, bony nose (Steinbeck, 1965: 1). The emphasis on quickness and alertness signals cognitive agility rather than physical dominance, positioning George as a character whose strength lies in perception and control of situations.

George’s strategic mindset appears in his choices about when to rest, when to move, and how to approach work:

“No reason at all for you. I like it here. Tomorrow we’re going to go to work. I saw thrashing machines on the way down. That means we’ll be bucking grain bags, busting a gut. Tonight I’m going to lie right here and look up. I like it.” (Steinbeck, 1965: 1).

This moment is not trivial; it shows George regulating effort and timing, an everyday form of strategy. He reads conditions, anticipates labor demands, and manages energy accordingly. In Toffler’s terms, this is knowledge used to optimize action. George’s mind power becomes most visible in contrast to Lennie. As George admits to Slim, “... made me seem God damn smart alongside him.” (Steinbeck, 1965: 2). The statement underscores a relational dynamic: George’s authority is amplified through his role as interpreter, decision-maker, and spokesperson. He translates the world for Lennie and, in doing so, exercises control over choices and consequences.

Practically, George directs their movements, negotiates with employers, and decides when to stay or leave. These acts constitute governance at a micro level: George allocates risk, manages information, and sets priorities. His “power” is not coercive but administrative and strategic.

George’s long-term vision, saving money to buy land, demonstrates how knowledge can be converted into economic potential. The dream functions as a financial plan: disciplined saving, controlled spending, and delayed gratification. Here, mind power is mobilized to pursue wealth power, not through inheritance, but through strategy.

Within a capitalist labor system, this positions George as a rational working-class subject who understands that autonomy depends on capital accumulation. He recognizes that wages alone reproduce dependency; only savings can potentially break it. However, George’s power remains fragile. He lacks initial capital and structural access, meaning his strategy operates under tight constraints. Thus, while mind power enables planning and partial control, it does not fully overcome systemic inequality. George can manage within the system, but cannot easily escape it.

From Toffler’s perspective, George illustrates how knowledge power can be leveraged toward wealth power, yet remains vulnerable without structural support. His authority is real but conditional, effective in decision-making but limited in transforming the broader social hierarchy. This finding also reflects the socio-economic conditions of the United States during the Great Depression. Steinbeck portrays George as an intelligent and responsible worker who consistently makes rational decisions, yet these qualities do not allow him to escape poverty. In a period marked by widespread unemployment, unstable work, and limited economic opportunities, knowledge alone was rarely enough to change one’s social position. Through George, Steinbeck suggests that personal capability could help individuals survive the harsh realities of the Depression, but it could not easily overcome the structural inequalities that concentrated wealth and opportunity in the hands of a few. In this sense, George’s struggle represents the experience of many migrant workers whose aspirations for economic security remained constrained by the broader economic system.

Money as a Source of Hope or Dreams

Of Mice and Men, written by John Steinbeck, is set against the backdrop of the Great Depression, a period marked by widespread economic collapse, unemployment, and social dislocation. As noted by Meng & Liu (2018), many Americans during this period lost their homes and livelihoods, forcing them to become migrant workers who moved from one place to another in search of temporary employment. These workers lived in unstable conditions and were often exploited within a capitalist labor system. Within this context, the idea of the American Dream emerges as a powerful psychological and economic aspiration.

The American Dream generally refers to the belief that success and prosperity can be achieved through hard work, often associated with financial stability, independence, and material comfort

(Putranto & Sosronegoro, 2012). For George and Lennie, this dream takes a very concrete form: owning a small piece of land where they can live independently and escape the cycle of wage labor. This aspiration is vividly expressed in the following passage:

“O.K. Someday—we’re gonna get the jack together and we’re gonna have a little house and a couple of acres an’ a cow and some pigs and—” “An’ live off the fatta the lan’,” Lennie shouted. “An’ have rabbits ...

“Well,” said George, “We’ll have a big vegetable patch and a rabbit hutch and chickens. And when it rains in the winter, we’ll just say the hell with going to work.” (Steinbeck, 1965: 1).

The quote above depicts this vision of land ownership is not merely a personal fantasy; it represents a desire for economic autonomy. In a system where workers depend entirely on wages, owning land symbolizes freedom from exploitation and control. The repeated narration of this dream throughout the novel serves an important function. It acts as a psychological survival mechanism, sustaining the characters’ motivation despite harsh working conditions and economic insecurity.

From a broader perspective, money becomes more than a medium of exchange; it becomes a symbol of potential power. The ability to save money represents the possibility of transforming one’s position from dependency to independence. Rather than simply promising happiness, money in this context signifies control over one’s life choices, including where to live, how to work, and how to sustain oneself. Thus, for migrant workers like George and Lennie, money embodies hope, not because it guarantees success, but because it offers a pathway, however fragile, toward dignity, stability, and self-determination within a restrictive economic system.

When read in the context of the Great Depression, George and Lennie’s dream of accumulating money reflects more than a desire for economic prosperity. It represents the migrant workers’ hope of escaping the uncertainties of the economic crisis. For them, money symbolizes the possibility of ending a life of constant job-hopping and building a more secure future. Through this representation, Steinbeck shows that amidst economic constraints, hope often rests on something very simple: the belief that hard work and savings can pave the way to a more dignified life, even though the chances of achieving it remain very fragile.

Money as a Tool of Control or Domination

In *Of Mice and Men*, money operates not merely as a medium of exchange, but as a mechanism of control that structures social relations and determines who holds power within the ranch system. Rather than being visible as physical force, economic power functions in more subtle yet effective ways, through employment, wages, and access to resources. This dynamic is clearly reflected in the character of Curley, whose authority is derived from his position as the son of the ranch owner. His power is not earned through labor or competence, but guaranteed through economic ownership and social status. “He just don’t give a damn. Won’t ever get canned ‘cause his old man’s the boss.” (Steinbeck, 1965: 2). This statement reveals that Curley’s authority is institutionally protected, allowing him to dominate others without fear of consequences. His power illustrates how economic capital translates directly into social control.

Beyond individual characters, the novel portrays a broader capitalist structure in which the ranch owner holds complete control over workers who lack economic resources. The migrant laborers are depicted as economically dependent, lacking stable contracts, social protection, and long-term security. This dependency creates an imbalance of power in which workers must submit to the authority of those who control wages and employment. Wages function as a key instrument of control. Candy’s remark “I got fifty more coming at the end of the month” (Steinbeck, 1965: 3) illustrates how income is limited and regulated by the employer.

This fixed and insufficient wage does not provide stability; instead, it perpetuates a cycle of dependency in which workers must continually seek employment from one ranch to another. “They come to a ranch and work up a stake and then they go into town and blow their stake, and the first thing you know they’re pounding their tail on some other ranch” (Steinbeck, 1965: 1). This quote shows that the workers’ wages do not provide stability in their lives. They will move from one capital owner to another. Rather than enabling upward mobility, wages function to reproduce labor conditions, ensuring that workers remain within the same economic position.

Besides using wages as a means of control, the workers' housing on the farms also served as a means of controlling the farm owners. The novel depicts workers receiving housing and other facilities so they can work whenever the farm owners desire.

"The bunkhouse was a long, rectangular building. Inside, the walls were whitewashed and the floor unpainted. In three walls there were small, square windows, and in the fourth, a solid door with a wooden latch. Against the walls were eight bunks, five of them made up with blankets and the other three showing their burlap ticking. Over each bunk there was nailed an apple box with the opening forward so that it made two shelves for the personal belongings of the occupant of the bunk. And these shelves were loaded with little articles, soap and talcum powder, razors and those Western magazines ranch men love to read and scoff at and secretly believe. And there were medicines on the shelves, and little vials, combs; and from nails on the box sides, a few neckties. Near one wall there was a black cast-iron stove, its stovepipe going straight up through the ceiling. In the middle of the room stood a big square table littered with playing cards, and around it were grouped boxes for the players to sit on..." (Steinbeck, 1965: 2).

Control is further reinforced through the provision of housing. The bunkhouse, though seemingly a basic facility, reflects a system in which workers' living conditions are fully regulated by the employer. This arrangement limits workers' autonomy, as their place of rest, work, and social life are all tied to the authority of the ranch owner. In this sense, space itself becomes a tool of control.

The vulnerability of workers is most evident in the character of Candy, who fears losing his job due to his physical limitations: Candy said, "I ain't much good with on'y one hand. I lost my hand right here on this ranch," (Steinbeck, 1965: 3). Candy's anxiety reflects a system in which a worker's value is reduced solely to productivity. Once that productivity declines, so does their economic security.

From the perspective of Alvin Toffler, this represents a shift from force power to wealth power, where control is exercised not through direct violence, but through economic dependency. In this system, the threat of losing wages or employment becomes more effective than physical coercion. Power is maintained through control of resources, not force.

Thus, the novel demonstrates that money functions as a dominant form of power that shapes behavior, limits freedom, and reinforces social hierarchy. Workers comply not because they are physically forced, but because their survival depends on access to economic resources controlled by others. This dynamic becomes more meaningful when viewed within the socio-economic context of the Great Depression. As unemployment increased and jobs became increasingly scarce, employers gained greater control over workers who had few alternatives for earning a living. Under these conditions, compliance was often a matter of survival rather than personal choice. Steinbeck therefore suggests that economic hardship intensified the unequal distribution of power, allowing those who controlled jobs and financial resources to shape the lives of migrant workers. Money, in this sense, operates not merely as an economic asset but as a mechanism through which social authority and dependency were reproduced during the Depression era.

Money as a Symbol of Social Inequity

In *Of Mice and Men*, money functions not only as a source of hope and a mechanism of control, but also as a symbol that reveals deep social inequality within the capitalist structure of the novel. The narrative constructs a clear division between those who possess capital and those who depend on labor. Characters such as George and Lennie represent the working class, whose survival relies on wages, while Curley and his father embody the owning class, whose authority stems from economic control. In this system, money determines not only economic status but also access to authority, voice, and dignity. Power is unevenly distributed, favoring those who control resources.

Curley's position illustrates how class privilege operates. His authority does not derive from competence, but from his proximity to ownership. This allows him to dominate workers and assert control without accountability, reinforcing a hierarchy in which economic status legitimizes behavior.

In contrast, the working class is depicted as structurally vulnerable. Their value is tied closely to their ability to perform labor, as seen in the character of Candy. Candy's fear of losing his job reflects a system in which economic survival depends entirely on productivity. When the capacity to work declines, so does one's security and social standing? From this, we can see that human worth or dignity

is determined solely by economic productivity. When someone no longer has the energy to work and earn money, they are considered worthless.

Besides being considered inferior, the working class also lacks the right to speak. This is reflected in the character of Crook, who does not dare to do anything despite experiencing discrimination. Because Crook is black, he is not allowed to live with his fellow workers in the bunk house. There is a social segregation between blacks and whites. Blacks are considered the lowest race. He is not allowed into the bunk house because of his black skin. This is evident in the conversation between Lennie and Crook,

“.... I ain’t wanted in the bunk hous, and you ain’t wanted in my room.” ...”Why you ain’t wanted?” Lennie asked. “Cause I’m black. They play cards in there, but I can’t play because I’m black. They say I stink. Well I tell you, you all of stink to me” (Steinbeck, 1965: 4).

This exclusion demonstrates that social inequality is not only economic but also racial. Despite being intellectually capable, Crooks is denied equal participation in social life due to his race. His segregation from the bunkhouse reflects a system in which race and class intersect, further limiting access to power. Unlike Curley, whose authority is secured by wealth, Crooks is marginalized despite his abilities because he lacks both economic and social capital.

From a broader perspective, this inequality reveals how money operates as a symbolic boundary that separates individuals into different social positions. In line with Alvin Toffler’s concept of wealth power, those who control economic resources also control social structures, determining who has authority and who remains excluded. Thus, the novel portrays money not simply as an economic tool, but as a marker of inequality that shapes identity, limits opportunity, and reinforces hierarchical divisions within society.

In the context of the Great Depression, money became a marker that distinguished those who had the opportunity to determine their future and those who could only survive from day to day. Steinbeck shows that the economic crisis was not experienced equally by everyone. Characters with access to resources remained in a more secure position, while migrant workers continued to live in uncertainty without control over their jobs or where they lived. Thus, the inequality that emerges in the novel is not simply a matter of income differences, but reflects a social structure that gives some people more life choices than others.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Money plays a significant role in John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. It plays a crucial role in shaping expectations, power relations, and inequality between people. In this novel, a person's power is clearly measured by the extent of their economic holdings, whether in the form of money, wealth, or land. This condition reflects the social reality of working-class society during the Great Depression, where human value was often determined by material possessions.

Steinbeck presents a critique of a society that places money and possessions as the primary measure of a person's power and worth. Drawing on Alvin Toffler's perspective, this study demonstrates that money not only functions as an economic tool but also as a source of power that shapes expectations, regulates social relations, and reinforces inequality among the characters.

When these findings are read within the socio-economic context of the United States during the Great Depression, the significance of money in the novel becomes even more profound. The economic crisis, marked by high unemployment, job insecurity, and concentrated ownership of economic resources, made money a primary determinant of survival and social standing. Under these conditions, George and Lennie's dream of owning a plot of land no longer simply reflects personal aspirations but represents the hopes of many migrant workers for a more stable, independent, and dignified life. Conversely, the experiences of characters like Curley, Candy, and Crooks demonstrate that differences in access to economic resources create unequal power relations and reinforce practices of social exclusion in the environments where they live and work.

Thus, *Of Mice and Men* not only tells the story of an individual tragedy but also reflects the socio-economic structure of America during the Great Depression that limited the social mobility of the working class. Through a combination of literary analysis, Alvin Toffler's theory of power, and the historical context of the Great Depression, this study shows that money functions as a structural force

that shapes expectations, determines power relations, and maintains social inequality. Although the novel is rooted in the realities of 1930s America, Steinbeck's representation of the relationship between money and power remains relevant to understanding how unequal access to economic resources still influences social relations in society today.

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