

## Corporate Crime in the Mirror of Labor Literature: A Discourse Analysis of the Novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes*

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### Introduction

The Proletarian narratives in literature, which are referred to as labor literature, are a reflection of the problems and suffering that workers endure. The social and political mission of labor literature is to seek justice for the working class and criticize the structural problems and economic inequalities that workers struggle with. Labor literature emphasizes the human rights of workers and criticizes power relations and the exploitation of workers. Works that fall within the realm of labor literature present a naked image of the capitalist system and its harms. In labor stories, the conditions and type of life, struggles, and oppression against workers are the focus of the authors (Farsian and Alizadeh 2019: 114). In this respect, labor literature narratives have provided a suitable platform for criminological analyses.

“Literary criminology” as an interdisciplinary movement is a new branch of criminology that studies and analyzes crimes and deviations in literary texts. Literary criminology focuses on the relationship between literature and criminology and explores how literary works depict crimes and metaphors (Wilson 2021: 5). Critical criminology also examines the vulnerable situation of workers in the face of power groups and views workers as victims of power relations and discriminatory structures. Critical criminology also analyzes the cycle of exploitation of workers and the abuse of the working class by the capitalist system.

The first research by criminologists in the school of realization criminology

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introduced economic, cultural, or psychological biological disorders as the main factors in committing crimes. In their opinion, criminals are different from law-abiding people, and poverty is the main component of committing crimes; as a result, wealthy and powerful people do not commit crimes, and in fact, the rich are the main victims of criminals (Najafi Abranabadi 2012: 11). Gradually, criminological perspectives developed and fundamental developments occurred in criminological theories. One of the most important new issues that emerged in the light of the emergence of critical criminology is the focus on corporate crimes (Danesh Nari 2018: 34).

In the capitalist system, the lower class is the target of criminalization, and the behaviors of power and wealth groups are less considered. Unlike mainstream criminologists (who emphasize individual and social factors), critical criminologists focus on the structures and inequalities in the distribution of power and wealth in their analysis of crimes. In this regard, critical criminology enables the ability to explain and understand corporate crimes against workers and their challenges. Considering the connection between critical criminology and labor literature, this study aims to examine the novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes* by Mohammad Ali Godini in the context of corporate crime analysis.

The main question of this research is: What is the relationship between labor literature as a reflection of labor conditions and the class system and critical criminology? In the novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes*, how do workers become victims of the capitalist system? Considering the inequalities between workers and capitalists and the importance of the subject, this research aims to analyze the different dimensions of corporate crimes against workers in the novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes* and to identify the reflection of criminological ideas in this novel.

## **1- Brief Analysis of the Novel**

The novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes* is a narrative of more than a decade of workers' lives at the Pars Spinning and Weaving Company. The main part of the novel deals with the problems and obstacles of production during the war. In order to reduce the company's costs, the new factory management reduces workers' welfare services and labels workers who oppose and protest as counter-revolutionaries. On the other hand, the company's managers seek to maintain appearances and justify the company's

image by carrying out a series of social activities, including sending aid to the front and installing Packard in support of the revolution. The company's managers call for patience and tolerance in the face of the workers' demands by holding epic and passionate speeches; but in return, they spend the company's budget on buying luxury cars and unnecessary personal expenses. The workers' cries of protest are heard throughout the story; but the company's managers stifle them in various ways.

## **2- Methodology**

The research method in this study is discourse analysis based on the theories of Laclau and Mouffe. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse analysis studies and examines the process of producing and establishing meaning in the social and political context. The meaning of discourse is that truths do not exist in a fixed and external form; rather, truths are represented through discourse; in other words, language creates and changes truth. For example, "worker" is considered a tool for production and economic growth in the discourse of managers, and in the discourse of the working class, it is considered a symbol of work and effort. In fact, meaning is not permanently and definitively established and is changing and evolving at the level of society.

## **3- Findings**

In the novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes*, the two discourses of "workers/lower class" and "managers/upper class" are highly frequent. The narrators of the first discourse are the workers in the novel, and this discourse is formed in the interaction between them in the workplace. The second discourse is the discourse of company managers and capitalist supporters, which is in opposition to the workers' discourse and, using the tools of ideology and power, is trying to marginalize the workers' discourse and make its own discourse prominent.

### **3-1. Workers' / Underclass Discourse**

The novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes* revolves around the life and work of workers, and therefore, the most important discourse of the novel is the "workers'/underclass discourse." Within the workers' discursive order, the discourse of each worker is placed. The symbol "worker" is considered the central signifier of this discourse,

and since workers' discourse is accompanied by protest against job status and social inequality, other signifiers that are related to the central signifier are also protest-related. These signifiers include anti-exploitation, lack of job security, protest against existing rules and regulations, unsafe work environments, and corrupt managers. Workers' discourse is placed under two headings: discrimination and social inequality, and corporate crimes against workers to establish a connection between the discourse and critical criminology theories.

### **3-2. Managers / Upper class Discourse**

Company managers are influenced by the organizational culture in the company; therefore, they commit crimes in order to comply with this culture. The discourse of managers and company owners is expressed under the managers/top-level discourse. The central signifier in this discourse is "wealth production," which is related to the signifiers of exercising power over workers, sanctifying work and production, ostentatiousness and justification, suppressing workers' demands, and making profits.

In the discourse of managers, the worker is only a tool; therefore, any kind of behavior can be done to him. In this discourse, workers are seemingly valued and respected, but in reality, they are oppressed and exploited. The discourse of managers does not feel any responsibility for corporate crimes and considers these behaviors legitimate. This discourse, backed by the power it supports, tries to become hegemonic over the workers' discourse and to push this discourse aside. The discourse of managers marginalizes workers' job security as a right and, by highlighting its own discourse, defines job security as a matter dependent on the company's opinion. Also, the discourse of managers interprets the exploitation of workers as a natural and permissible thing and diminishes the discourse of workers who try to resist this meaning. Due to their financial dependence on companies, workers are forced to accept and follow the managers' discourse, and as a result, the managers' discourse gains hegemony over the workers' discourse.

## **Conclusion**

Literature plays a special role in interdisciplinary research in the humanities. The multifaceted and multidimensional nature of literature provides a suitable context

for interdisciplinary studies. Literary criminology, as an interdisciplinary branch, studies criminological issues in literary works. In this article, the teachings of critical criminology in the novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes*, as one of the works of labor literature, were analyzed. Proletarian literature and critical criminology criticize social inequalities, class conflict, and structural discrimination as consequences of the capitalist system. In these two fields, workers are actually considered the silent victims of society. Proletarian literature establishes a close link with critical criminology by depicting the hard lives of workers, labor exploitation, and labor violence. These two fields criticize labor laws, government protections, and the capitalist system, seeing them as key factors in creating inequality and injustice. Critical criminologists believe that the laws of the capitalist system are enacted in a way that protects the interests of the ruling class and keeps workers exploited; for example, labor protests are met with criminal sanctions. This approach is also evident in proletarian literature.

Crimes committed by the powerful mainly target the weak and inferior groups and strata of society. Today, more attention has been paid to these crimes, and critical criminologists have also revealed the importance of these crimes through research in this area. One of the solutions to combat crimes committed by the powerful is to develop the responsibility and accountability of the perpetrators of these crimes to society. However, regarding corporate crimes, which are one of the faces of crimes committed by the powerful, the criminal justice system needs to be reformed and revised to hold commercial companies accountable for harmful corporate behavior.

**Keywords:** Corporate crime, literary criminology, organizational culture, novel *A Woman in Men's Shoes*, crimes of the powerful

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