

CHAPTER II

THE REMOVALISTS: POWER, AUTHORITY AND PUNISHMENT

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The present chapter analyses the play *The Removalists* in the context of power, authority and punishment. It depicts the struggle between the authority and middle class society in Australia to balance the power equilibrium.

The Removalists (1971) deals with the theme of use, misuse and abuse of power as well as authority in social institutions like family and the police department. It depicts the domestic and institutional corruption and violence. It is a black comedy which creates humour through the dreadful situations. The action of the play is divided into two acts and has six characters. They include Sergeant Dan Simmonds, Constable Neville Ross, Kate Mason, Fiona Carter, her husband Kenny Carter and the Removalist named Rob. Rob Plays very minor but significant role in the play. The setting for the first act is at the suburban police station, and second is Kenny's flat.

The play opens at a suburban police station, with a discussion between two police officers Dan Simmonds, a Sergeant and Ross, a newly joined Constable. It is revealed through their communication that it is his first day in the office as Simmonds enquires Ross about his family and father's profession. Though Simmonds repeatedly asks the same questions, Ross is unwilling to tell the truth. The two women Fiona and Kate enter the police station to lodge a complaint against Fiona's husband, Kenny Carter. Because of the harsh and inhuman treatment given by her husband, Fiona wants a separation from him. Kate already

knows that Fiona suffers a lot under Kenny's pressure hence she encourages her for the separation. They lodge a complaint against Kenny in the police station and plan to appoint a Removalist to shift the furniture from the present flat to new one. They decided that Friday would be convenient because on that day Kenny usually comes late at home, after the eleven in the night. So it is easy to shift the furniture in his absence. But, unfortunately, Kenny comes home very early than the usual time. Fiona tries to persuade Kenny to leave the house before the arrival of the Removalist, but he ignores. When Kate enters the flat as per the plan, she gets shocked, because she finds Kenny still in the home. The sisters had some discussion when the doorbell rings, and they get scared. They anticipate the arrival of Removalist on the door. Kenny opened the door and asked the stranger what he wanted. The person outside replied that he was Rob, the Removalist, and was appointed on the job of removing the furniture. Kenny states that he is the owner of the flat, and he didn't call anyone for that reason. It led to a quarrel between the two. Rob refuses to leave the place and demands \$500 as compensation. He had come with a vehicle; therefore, he needed the expenses of it. At the end of the conversation, Kenny gets outraged and shuts the door on his face. After some time, Simmonds and Ross enter the house. The police officer orders Ross to tie Kenny with handcuffs to the door. They beat him so severely at that he dies suddenly because of brain haemorrhage.

In the article 'David Williamson' Meryl Tobin explains David Williamson's own views about this play. He states that "Yet though a policeman in the play bashes one of the main characters, Kenny, to death, David Williamson says the play is not about brutality. He says the audience reaction varies as to this as an 'anti-cop' play. For instance, to

Maoists it has no laugh. In the end, they give a power salute. But to others it's a Comedy of Manners with laughs throughout." (39-40)

According to Darwin, male has an inborn capacity to control over others. Every male controls the female in the family as well as in the society. He beats his wife and also controls on other members of the society or institution. Dan Simmonds, the Sergeant in the police station uses power over all the characters in the play. He uses his position as a Sergeant in the police station as well as he uses physical power while fighting with others. He also wants to establish a relationship with women by using his position and power. He exerts political power over his newly appointed Constable Ross; the two sisters who come to make a complaint and Fiona's husband Kenny. It is observed that Simmonds threatens Kenny with the use of physical power.

SIMMONDS: (*shaking KENNY*) I'm warning you, boy. I'll crack your bloody skull if I hear any more of that type of language. (77)

Ross has his first day in the police force, and he is unaware of the rules and regulations of the police station. He has recently completed the training and has joined the department. He technically knows how to use a pistol and how to make an arrest. Simmonds asks various questions to Ross about his father and his occupation, but he does not answer correctly. Throughout the play, he appears to resist the power used at him. When they discuss the matter of corruption in the police station, Simmonds states that it is an evil that create corruption and violence in society. Simmonds advised Ross not to get involved in any form of corruption in his life. He tells Ross that money doesn't matter at his age and discourages him in the force.

Simmonds uses abusive and vulgar language while describing his family members. He exerts physical power over his wife and harasses her sexually and physically. He doesn't have healthy relations with his family. He mentions 'My wife's a Mick.' (35)

Simmonds dominates Ross at every step to show that he has the power to control other's behaviour. Simmonds and Ross are responsible for the death of Kenny. They create physical as well as verbal violence through the action of punching and beating him and use abusive words for him. In the discussion, it becomes clear that he wants to control Ross. When he didn't get proper answer, he gets angry and retorts:

SIMMONDS: I thought we just had this out. Who's in authority here?

ROSS: I just don't think it's any of your business.

SIMMONDS: (*loudly*) Look Ross. I'm in authority here, and I'll decide what's my business and what isn't my business.

(*Pause.*)

You're a bit of a rebel in your own quiet way. Aren't you? Makes you feel good? (40)

It is seen through a dialogue that Simmonds exerts his authoritative power as a Sergeant, and holds the position of the head in the police department.

Kate Mason and Fiona Carter come to lodge a complaint against Kenny, who is Fiona's husband. He exerts physical power over Fiona. Kenny tortures his wife physically and mentally, so she wants a separation from him. She has got bruises on her back and thigh, and this indicates that she was beaten badly by her husband. She also has a

medical report from a doctor which proves that Fiona has the bruises, and it is helpful for her to use it as a strong proof against Kenny.

FIONA: (*calmly, matter of fact*) I was beaten by my husband? (48)

KATE: You should see her bruises.

SIMMONDS: It could still help. If we can include in the report that bruises were obvious even to the medically untrained eye, it could lend a lot of weight.

KATE: (*looking at SIMMONDS*) She's got another bruise on her thigh. (54-55)

From the dialogue, it clears that Kenny has beaten Fiona badly, and she had bruises on her thigh and back. She is rather being exploited sexually and physically.

Simmonds and Kate exert their power on Fiona as their position to maintain the relations. Being an elder sister, Kate Mason exerts power on Fiona. Kate accompanies Fiona to the police station to lodge a complaint against Kenny. She also helps to take a new flat in South Yarra to live separately from Kenny. Kate Mason's husband, Ralph, is a dentist. They have three children named Mick, Donnie and Anthony, and they are eight, six and five years old respectively. They attend the most expensive schools in Melbourne. She lives in the upper class society and controls all. Like Simmonds, Mason exerts her power over her sister and her husband, Ralph. Kate controls her sister Fiona using economic, as well as positional power.

Kate uses the gender power on Simmonds and Ross. She supports and advises her sister well which reflects her feminist attitude. She plays a vital role not only in her family but also in her sister's life. She exerts

her power over Simmonds when she realizes that the action of the Sergeant is not good, so she insists her sister to come with her. Simmonds opposes her plan and tells that they would accompany Fiona to her new flat. Kate strongly opposes it, because she knew the evil intentions of the Sergeant. It is expressed through the following dialogue.

KATE: (*teeth clenched*) Oh no you won't. You won't go near that flat tonight or any other night. For all your moralizing, you're nothing but a pervert, Sergeant. I know your type. I saw the look on your face when you were fondling Fiona's thigh down at the station.

SIMMONDS: (*livid*) Get out!

KATE: Don't threaten me!

SIMMONDS: (*loud*) Get outside!

KATE: What will you do if I don't? Chain me to the bloody door and rape me?

SIMMONDS: (*advancing on her*) Get outside!

KATE: Tell us all what happened down at the station, Sergeant. Tell us! (104)

Thus, Kate has a position in the society. She does not bear the misbehaviour even with her sister. In this way, every character in this play tries to exert his/her power over other. They try to control one another by using whatever power they have. Some use power intently and boldly, some are oblivious to the power politics.

In the play it is observed for several times, Simmonds dominates his wife and does not hesitate even to beat her. For instance – it is planned that as Kenny does not come before eleven in the night, the

Removalist should come in his absence. It is also decided that if Kenny comes before the work of shifting, Simmonds and Ross will take the action against him. In the course of the play, it is revealed that though the Police department is very strict with others, they ignore their own crimes. Simmonds and Ross beat Kenny because he is assaulting his wife. They are responsible for the death of Kenny, but they are not punished.

Kenny uses physical power on Fiona. By using physical force and power, he creates domestic violence. Fiona was ironing and making preparations for shifting the material from the flat. Kenny comes at home at six thirty in the evening. She is shocked and surprised to see him so early. Fiona wants Kenny to leave the flat before the Removalist arrives there, so she repeatedly requests him “Why don’t you go and have a counter tea with the boys?” (64). Kenny uses abusive language, authority and power over Fiona. Kenny always beats and bashes her. He treats her body as an object of sexual desire.

KENNY: (*getting up from the television and moving to her with an air of conciliation*) Anyrate let’s not argue. I didn’t come home to argue.

(*He feels her bum. It is obvious what he has come home for. She doesn’t react.*)

How about coming and watching some television?

(*He feels her breasts and bum. She doesn’t react.*)

FIONA: (*edgy*) I’m not in the mood. (68)

The dialogue reveals that she is harassed sexually and physically. Thus she has to play a role of a sex partner without any emotional

attachment that irritates her. She does not want to maintain emotional and sexual relations with him as she knows that it is temporary and physical.

As per the plan, Kate comes to the Kenny's flat and gets shocked to see him. The Removalist arrives at the flat with the vehicle. Kenny opens the door and surprised to know that he is there to shift the furniture. As he does not know the fact, he becomes confused and starts quarrelling with him. Removalist after re-assuring the address for two times begins to quarrel for cancellation charges as per the Transport Board regulations. Kenny is not ready to give him money, and Removalist insists on the cancellation fees. Kenny does not pay the fees and closes the door on his face.

Kenny walks back in the centre of the room, and there is another knock on the door. He thinks that it would be Rob, but it is by Simmonds. After opening the door, Simmonds orders Ross to handcuff Kenny to the door and he starts to beat him. Kenny gets confused about all these advances around him and repeatedly enquires about the reasons of his arrest. Simmonds explains that he has assaulted his wife, Fiona and the gentleman, Rob. He exerts his authority and power over Kenny through the action of beating. Simmonds orders Ross to beat Kenny for his replies. Ross makes use of physical as well as authoritative power on Kenny. In this incident, Simmonds abuses his power to create physical violence and establish his dominance over the arrested one and the newly appointed fellow constable. Under his dominance Ross also becomes irrational and beats Kenny whenever he tries to answer him –

ROSS: (*highly excited*) Don't talk to me like that, fella. I'm warning you. I'm an officer of the law. Don't talk to me like that. You come quietly, fella, I'm warning you. (75)

It seems that when power comes in the hands of Ross, he uses it ruthlessly. At the end of the play, Kenny is dead due to brain haemorrhage. Rob and Ross help Fiona to shift the furniture, and they settle it in the new flat. At the end of the play when Ross realizes Kenny is dead, he pleads Simmonds to support him, that he flatly ignores and states a maxim that "Control is the essence of the law" (110). Dominance is another characteristic of power which is reflected throughout the play. Male dominates in the family as well as in the society with the ability to fight with others.

Williamson depicts the familial status, economic power, social prestige and male dominance as major reasons of the violence. In this play, violence is also created through situations, actions and the language used by the characters. They use slang and filthy language to communicate with each other. Physical and verbal violence is created by Simmonds, Ross and Kenny. Kenny beats his wife; Simmonds and Ross use their power to control Kenny and beat him. In the play, they use such words like 'bitch, shit, fuck, bastard,' etc. to exploit the people around them. Kenny uses the word 'bitch' for his wife and 'little dog' for his daughter. Kate uses the word 'pig' for Kenny.

The play thus presents different kinds of power exerted by the characters in different social situations but for the same reason of dominance. This power and dominance is reflected in different human

relationships like family relationships, husband-wife relationships and relationships at working places.

Holding power on others, different relationships are maintained in the play. They include marital relationships; family relationship and professional relationship. At the beginning of the play, when Simmonds and Ross appear on the stage, Williamson demonstrates the professional relationship between them. Dan Simmonds is the Sergeant of the suburban police station and controls the power as a senior officer. In twenty-three years of service, he has never made an arrest nor has used the pistol. Through their communication it is revealed that the relations are also shaped by the social and professional status. When Simmonds asks him several questions about his family background, Ross hides that his father is a coffin maker but eventually reveals it. In the work relations, people may or may not like one another, but they have to live together. In this relationship, Simmonds tries to apply power to control Ross.

In the discussion with Ross, Simmonds refers to his family members and reveals that he has not good and healthy family relations. His wife is unfaithful to him. His daughter marries a bastard at her own choice. At first, he is not agreeing to accept the marriage but only for the sake of daughter, he accepts his son-in-law. His son is a project builder and is in search of a carpenter for sub-contracting the houses. Simmonds is not happy with his family, so he is interested in extra martial relationship. At the end of the play, he suggests a female companionship for Kenny and provides information about call girls.

The play reveals how the social status, political power, economic stability and emotional sturdiness influence the human relations. Most of

the characters in this play are unhappy with each other. Kate Mason and Fiona Carter are sisters in the play that is a fine example of sisterhood. Kate presents a feminist view and wants that her sister would live and enjoy a happy life. Fiona's husband beats her, so they come to police station to complain against him. She encourages as well as supports her sister to live separately from her husband with her daughter Sophie. Kate loves her sister and cares for her. She doesn't want a bad reflection of the parents on their child, so Sophie lives with her grandmother. Kate helps Fiona to buy a new flat, to make a report at the police station and also to shift the furniture from the old flat to a new one. Kate has real love and affection towards her younger sister Fiona.

Kate has a family that consists of her husband and three children. She is not happy with her life partner. Her children have been admitted to the most expensive schools in the Melbourne. She enjoys an aristocratic lifestyle. Her husband is a dentist and has a good reputation and relations with society. Kate arranges a flat in South Yarra for Fiona because the estate agent Weller has good relations with Kate's husband, Ralph. Ralph has treated Weller's teeth, so he is ready to give the flat. Kate is not happy with her life partner, but she loves him.

KATE: (*sensing that her sister is gently sending her up*) My private life may not be spotless, Sergeant, but I want you to know that I'm very fond of my husband.

SIMMONDS: You don't have to offer me an explanation, Mrs. Mason.

KATE: (*looking murderously at FIONA*) They laugh at Ralph behind his back, but he's a very fine man. He's provided a good life for me and my children and he's a fine man. (85)

This dialogue presents Kate's love for Ralph. She has a relationship with her friend Eric, who is the Marketing manager of one of the largest car manufacturers.

Kenny and Fiona is another unhappy couple in the play. Kenny is a working class man who represents the stereotype male character of 1970s Australia. He belongs to middle class society, so he uses the language which strongly associates him with the middle class society. He also shows the patriarchal and male dominated power system in the family as he harasses his wife physically, sexually and mentally. He plays with her body as a sex object and as a housewife treats her as a commodity. She thinks that her child must have good manners, so her daughter Sophie lives with her grandmother. Fiona wants a stable and happy life, so she wants a separation from Kenny. She buys a new flat in South Yarra for herself and her daughter. From the beginning to the end in the play, Kenny does not use a single good word for her. He repeatedly insults, abuses and beats her. When Simmonds uses excessive power to control Kenny, Fiona replies in an angry tone. It expresses her genuine love towards Kenny. In this way, Kenny and Fiona though married, do not make a successful marital relationship. Fiona's love is presented through following dialogue.

SIMMONDS: Well if that is the case I had better give you something to complaint about. (*SIMMONDS punches KENNY in the gut again as the REMOVALIST and ROSS return.*)

FIONA: (*alarmed at the violence*) Sergeant- (78)

FIONA: Could you let him off the handcuff now, Sergeant?

SIMMONDS: Mr. Carter was not handcuffed for your convenience, Mrs. Carter. Mr. Carter is being detained pending arrest for offensive behaviour.

FIONA: I'm not intending to press charges against him. (105)

Kenny wants to live with his daughter, but Fiona refuses it. She tells him that he may see Sophie on weekends.

KENNY: (*hurt, outraged*) There is nothin' wrong with the way I live, you bitch. (*To FIONA*) that little kid loves me. Follows me round like a little dog. We have a wrestle every night. (77)

It seems that Kenny and Sophie do not intensely hate each other but something went wrong in their relations.

Simmonds, Kate and Fiona appoint the Removalist to shift the furniture from old flat to the new one. Kenny refuses the permission, but the Removalist does not pay attention to him and starts his works with the help of police officers, Simmonds and Ross. Officers beat and harass Kenny physically in his own house. Kenny is the victim of the power politics in the play.

Ross has a girlfriend named Marilyn. They do not have a healthy and good relationship. One day he wants to go with her, but Simmonds asks him for extra work, he asks for overtime and explains that if overtime has been offered to him, she should not oppose him to work. They try to earn more money and try to save money to purchase a house. Thus, it is showed that the economic interests also influence the love relations.

In this way, *The Removalists* depicts three issues that present the situation of 1970s Australia. Playwrights motif of depicting the socio-cultural, political and psychological problems of contemporary Australian society is clearly stated in the introduction of the play, as he raises the questions like – ‘Is Australian society violent of its essence?’, ‘Do the forces of ‘law and order’ rest on violence? , and do all of us have the kinds of aggressive instincts or behaviour patterns? (7). The play, thus deals with the issue of power that creates many social, familial and political problems in the contemporary Australia. The play speaks about the people who gain power and also about the people who lose it. It also comments on the use or rather misuse and abuse of power. Thus, in this play the power is the sole and ultimate source to gain a social prestige.

Thus, *The Removalists* represents power, authority and punishment through the institutions like family and police department. The play focuses police brutality and corruption, domestic violence, misuse of laws, and anti-authoritarianism. Power is also associated with wealth and position in the society. Everyone exerts power at his individual level and maintains the relations among each other. Authoritative and economically sound characters hold the power and ordinary and middle class people are irrationally punished.