

“Do Now” Work

How does Armitage present his ideas in 'Remains'?

Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Task: This is how Simon Armitage described his own poetry.

"These are poems of survivors - the damaged, exhausted men who return from war in body but never, wholly, in mind."

What do you think this means?

In Silence Please

 **BOURNVILLE**
SCHOOL

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'Remains' is about a soldier suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

The poem is based on a soldier's experience in Iraq in 2003. Armitage creates a persona for the soldier.

The poem is based on this interview with a soldier:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DHWqppktFo>



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Key Words

- 'looter' – someone raiding a shop or bank to steal goods – often in an opportunistic rather than planned approach
- 'open fire' – to start shooting at someone or something
- 'on patrol' – a regular route taken by soldiers as part of their guard duty

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Simon Armitage 'Remains'

On another occasion, we got sent out
to tackle looters raiding a bank.
And one of them legs it up the road,
probably armed, possibly not.

Well myself and somebody else and somebody else
are all of the same mind,
so all three of us open fire.
Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear

I see every round as it rips through his life –
I see broad daylight on the other side.
So we've hit this looter a dozen times
and he's there on the ground, sort of inside out,

pain itself, the image of agony.
One of my mates goes by
and tosses his guts back into his body.
Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry.

End of story, except not really.
His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol
I walk right over it week after week.
Then I'm home on leave. But I blink

and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.
Sleep, and he's probably armed, possibly not.
Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds.
And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –

he's here in my head when I close my eyes,
dug in behind the enemy lines,
not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land
or six-feet under in desert sand,

but near to the knuckle, here and now,
his bloody life in my bloody hands.

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Comprehension Questions

1. What are the looters doing?
2. How many men open fire?
3. How many times do they shoot the man?
4. Where is the body taken?
5. What style of language does Armitage use in this poem?
6. Is the looter armed?
7. What does the speaker use in an attempt to clear his mind?
8. What do we know about the location of the conflict?

Deeper Thinking Questions

1. When the body is 'carted off in the back of a lorry', the speaker concludes 'End of story'. Why does this not turn out to be the case?
2. How many times has the soldier experienced situations like this?
3. Who is to blame for the death of the looter?
4. In the introduction to his collection *The Not Dead*, Armitage says 'warfare has changed, and so has poetry'. How do you think this is reflected by this poem?

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Be able to identify techniques and explore the effect on the reader.

Compare the ways poets present the effects of conflict in 'Remains' and in one other poem from Power and Conflict.

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S 'End of story, except not really'

P 'his bloody life in my bloody hands'

L 'blink', 'sleep', 'dream'

I 'blood shadow'

T 'probably armed, possibly not'

Can you find a technique for each of these quotations?

What is the effect of each quotation?

Challenge: Which other poem would you choose and how would you compare them?

'Remains' Armitage

Context:

The 'desert sands' suggests this poem is about the conflict in Iraq in 2003. Armitage explores the effects of post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on a soldier who killed a man in Iraq.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2DHWqppktFo>

Themes:

Effects of conflict
Experience of soldiers
Reality of conflict
Memory

S 'End of story, except not really' - **volta** - Armitage shows the mental effects of conflict continue after the event.

P 'his bloody life in my bloody hands' - **repetition**. This reinforces the soldier's guilt. 'Bloody hands' links to 'Macbeth'

L 'blink', 'sleep', 'dream' - These **verbs** show that the memory doesn't leave the soldier. He can't escape it.

I 'blood shadow.' - This **metaphor** **foreshadows** the idea that the memory will haunt him. It's a visual reminder of the looter's death.

T 'probably armed, possibly not'. The **repetition** implies that the soldier feels guilty as this is replayed in his mind. The syntactical positioning of the adverbs creates a sense of doubt that haunts the soldier.

