



REMAINS KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER



Context – *Remains* was written by Simon Armitage, and was published in *The Not Dead* in 2008.

Simon Armitage – Simon Armitage (born 1963) is an English poet, playwright, and novelist. He is the current Professor of Poetry at the University of Leeds, and also a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. His poems are characterised by their ease of accessibility, their realist style, and their cutting critique. Many of Armitage's poems contain a darkly comic, although *Remains* in particular is without the element of comedy.



Modern Conflicts – Even since the catastrophic world wars of the early twentieth century, Britain has still found itself in numerous conflicts around the world – amongst the most notorious of these have been the conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and the Falklands. Poetry has a long-standing tradition of trying to document war experiences for those at home. *Remains* is set in Basra in the Iraq, which was the scene of the Battle of Basra in 2003.



'The Not Dead' – 'The Not Dead' was initially a Channel Four documentary featuring testimonies from ex-military personnel who had served in numerous conflicts. Armitage was reportedly so inspired by the programme that he produced a collection of war poetry using the same name (featuring 'Remains'). The poems are written in response to the testimonies of soldiers, many of whom have been through events that they struggle to forget even years afterwards.



Psychological Effects of War – The incidence of ex-servicemen with anxiety, depression, and PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) is exceptionally high. Furthermore, the rate of suicide amongst ex-soldiers around the world is far higher than the general populace. Many struggle to get over the horrors that they have seen in war, and are haunted by bad memories. In this sense, 'The Not Dead' are the ghosts of ex-comrades and enemies trapped inside the memories of those that live on.



Language/Structural Devices

Figurative Language – Armitage uses a number of figurative language techniques to demonstrate both the physical actions and the psychological consequences of the war. For example, the 'blood-shadow' that remains on the street after the event serves as a physical reminder of the violence that has taken place, but can also be seen as a psychological manifestation of the speaker's guilt over his part in the death of the looter.

Violent/ Graphic Imagery – It is befitting that in a poem dealing with the horrific and unsettling memories of the ex-serviceman, the speaker does not leave out more explicit and uninhibited details from his depiction. An image is etched in the reader's mind of a man, writhing in agony, with parts of their body detached from their original place, 'left for dead.' Furthermore, these grotesque details are juxtaposed with commonplace actions to make the event seem everyday.

Quote: "End of story, except not really. His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol"

Quote: "and tosses his guts back into his body. Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry."

Alliteration – Armitage repeats specific sounds both to echo the scene of conflict, and to also affect the tone of the poem. For example, the alliteration of the 's' sound in 'sun-stunned, sand-smothered' to replicate the sizzling, scorching heat of the desert, whilst the heavy 'd' sound in 'dug', 'dead', 'drink', 'drugs' mirrors the depressed state of the speaker.

Colloquialisms – The speaker uses a number of colloquial terms to mirror army culture and unity, and also his apparent youth inexperience. (e.g. 'mate, legged it). These colloquialisms later combine to imply that the soldiers have disregard for human life – words such as 'tossed' and 'carted' suggest actions are not carried out with care or empathy.

Quote: "dug in behind enemy lines/ not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land"

Quote: "And one of them legs it up the road, probably armed, possibly not."

Form – *Remains* is written in 8 stanzas, the first 7 of which are mostly unrhymed quatrains. The final stanza contains only two lines, perhaps reflecting the disintegration of the speaker's psychological state. There is a more regular rhythmic pattern throughout the first part of the poem, but this breaks down as the speaker's memories flood back later.

Structure – *Remains* is written as a monologue. It is clearly a reflection of the past, and yet is largely written in the present tense, which is representative of the fact that the memories from the past have accompanied the speaker into the present. There is the occasional use of enjambment to make the monologue seem more conversational.

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

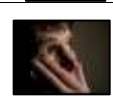
Quote: "Well myself and somebody else and somebody else are all of the same mind."

Themes – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text.

Suffering/ The Horrors of War – The poem offers graphic details of the horrific events that take place in war. The poem not only covers the brutality of armed combat, but also graphic details regarding the grotesque effects of bullets on the human body, and the agony suffered by those who are wounded. It really is the stuff of nightmares.



The Lasting Effects of War – The poem deals with the lasting impact of war on those that experience it – in this case the ex-servicemen who took part in the fighting. The speaker in the poem is forced to deal with the horrifying images of what he has seen long after the events themselves, and carries the guilt of his actions like a burden. These factors contribute to his weakened psychological state, which appears fraught by anxiety and PTSD.



Line-by-Line Analysis

STANZA	LINE	POEM	ANALYSIS
1	1	On another occasion, we get sent out	The speaker is relaying a story to an unknown third party – assumedly some kind psychiatrist. The time and place of the event is established. 'On another occasion' suggests that this is only one of many horrific events. The use of slang e.g. 'legs it' and his lack of awareness about whether the man was armed makes the reader consider that the soldier is likely young/inexperienced.
	2	to tackle looters raiding a bank.	
	3	And one of them legs it up the road,	
	4	probably armed, possibly not.	
2	5	Well myself and somebody else and somebody else	The memory of the finer details of the event seem somewhat hazy, a commonly-reported side-effect after a traumatic event – the speaker cannot remember exactly who he was with. Line 6 makes the reader consider their military training – they manage their situation through actions and responses like machines – their human empathy apparently withdrawn.
	6	are all of the same mind,	
	7	so all three of us open fire.	
3	8	Three of a kind all letting fly, and I swear	The opening lines of stanza 3 undo the past few lines, by showing the human element to the soldier. There is violent imagery of the bullets 'ripping' through his skin, and the emotional aspect of his life coming to an end. In lines 11 and 12, the speaker checks himself & returns to hardened army description of the looter.
	9	I see every round as it rips through his life –	
	10	I see broad daylight on the other side.	
4	11	So we've hit this looter a dozen times	The figurative statement in line 13 shows how etched into the speaker's mind the man lying in agony has become. The imagery created throughout the remainder of the stanza is truly haunting, which is exacerbated by the use of the casual, unceremonious manner in which it is carried out (words such as 'mates', 'tosses' and 'carts' heavily imply this).
	12	and he's there on the ground, sort of inside out,	
	13	pain itself, the image of agony.	
	14	One of my mates goes by	
5	15	and tosses his guts back into his body.	The speaker begins to discuss the lasting effect in the days and weeks that immediately follow. The 'blood-shadow' attacks the speaker with a physical reminder of what has happened. It becomes clear that the speaker needs to get away from the location of the event, which seems to be the case in line 20. However, the stanza ends with 'But I blink' which leaves the reader in a state of anticipation.
	16	Then he's carted off in the back of a lorry.	
	17	End of story, except not really.	
	18	His blood-shadow stays on the street, and out on patrol	
6	19	I walk right over it week after week.	Where the poem was slow-paced and regular, it now becomes a stream of consciousness rush of half-finished words and phrases, as it becomes evident that speaker is also affected by the memory of the incident even at home and when asleep. There is no rest from the memories, and a sense of desperation in the increased, irregular rhythm of the poem now, reflecting his anxiety.
	20	Then I'm home on leave. But I blink	
	21	and he bursts again through the doors of the bank.	
	22	Sleep, and he's probably armed, possibly not.	
7	23	Dream, and he's torn apart by a dozen rounds.	The speaker reiterates how the enemy is now always with him – through the repetition the reader gains an increasing sense of how tiring it must be to live with this day after day. The use of military terms, e.g. 'dug-in' shows how the army has submersed his personality. Line 27 gives the reader hazy imagery of the faraway scene of the event, utilising alliteration of the 's' sound to reflect the searing heat of the desert.
	24	And the drink and the drugs won't flush him out –	
	25	he's here in my head when I close my eyes,	
	26	dug in behind enemy lines,	
8	27	not left for dead in some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land	The final stanza offers no respite, reflective of how he has no escape from the memories that haunt his mind. The reader now considers the dual meaning of the title: the 'remains' of the man tossed onto the lorry, 'left for dead' & the 'remains' of the speaker who is forever haunted.
	28	or six-feet-under in desert sand,	
	29	but near to the knuckle, here and now,	
	30	his bloody life in my bloody hands.	

Poems for Comparison

Exposure/ Bayonet Charge	Thoughts of the Poet
<i>Remains</i> can be contrasted with these poems in relation to the themes of <u>suffering</u> and the <u>horrors of war</u> .	<i>"Never having been to the front line, turning the words, phrases and experiences of these soldiers into verse has been the closest I've ever come to writing 'real' war poetry, and as close as I ever want to get," said Simon.</i>
<i>War Photographer/ Poppies</i>	<i>The Not Dead received excellent reviews in the press and moving responses on the Web from other veterans. "I wasn't present when the three men read the poems to camera, but it can't have been easy for them. In my view, it was a supreme act of bravery," Simon added. From www.simonarmitage.com</i>

