

ASM TUITION ACADEMY

REMAINS

Remains

On another occasion, we get 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 the 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 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.

Context:

- **Historical and Social Context:** “Remains” is a poem by Simon Armitage, first published in his 2008 collection *The Not Dead*, which focuses on the experiences of ex-soldiers and the psychological impact of war. The poem is based on the account of a British soldier who served in the Iraq War. It captures the raw and disturbing effects of combat, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The poem addresses the themes of guilt, trauma, and the difficulty of returning to civilian life after witnessing and participating in violent acts.

- **Military and Psychological Context:** The poem deals with the long-term consequences of war on soldiers, especially the mental and emotional scars that remain long after the physical combat has ended. It delves into the psychological turmoil of a soldier who is haunted by a specific memory—killing a man who was "probably armed, possibly not." The phrase reflects the ambiguity and moral complexity of warfare, where soldiers must make split-second decisions that have life-altering consequences.
 - **Literary Context:** "*Remains*" is part of a collection written to raise awareness about the struggles faced by soldiers suffering from PTSD. The poem's conversational tone and use of colloquial language add authenticity to the voice of the speaker, making the poem relatable and direct.
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Poetic Devices:

1. Imagery:

- Armitage uses vivid and graphic imagery to convey the brutality of war and its psychological aftermath:
 - "I see every round as it rips through his life— / I see broad daylight on the other side."
 - "Sort of inside out, pain itself, the image of agony."
 - These images create a stark, unsettling picture of violence and death, emphasizing the horror and impact of the soldier's actions.

2. Repetition:

- Repetition is used to emphasize the speaker's ongoing trauma and the inescapability of his memories:
 - "Probably armed, possibly not" is repeated twice to reflect the uncertainty and guilt that plague the soldier's conscience.
 - "His bloody life in my bloody hands" repeats the word "bloody" to signify both literal bloodshed and the speaker's frustration and guilt.

3. Enjambment:

- Armitage employs enjambment (the continuation of a sentence without a pause beyond the end of a line) to create a sense of urgency and flow, mimicking the soldier's stream of consciousness:
 - "And he's there on the ground, sort of inside out, / pain itself, the image of agony."
 - This technique also reflects the fragmented nature of the soldier's thoughts, which are jumbled and chaotic due to his trauma.

4. Caesura:

- The poem uses caesura (pauses within a line) to emphasize the speaker's hesitation and emotional conflict:
 - "End of story, except not really."
 - The abrupt pause mirrors the speaker's realization that the story is far from over, even though the actual event has ended.

5. Metaphor:

- Metaphors are used to describe the psychological impact of the traumatic memory:
 - "His blood-shadow stays on the street" symbolizes the lingering presence of the man's death, which haunts the speaker.

- “Dug in behind enemy lines” is a metaphor for the way the memory is entrenched in the speaker’s mind, like a soldier hiding in enemy territory.
- 6. **Simile:**
 - The comparison “spits like a tame cat turned savage” is a simile that depicts the transformation of the speaker’s mental state, from calm to uncontrollably violent.
- 7. **Colloquial Language:**
 - The use of conversational and colloquial language (“and one of them legs it up the road”) adds authenticity to the soldier’s voice and makes the poem feel like a personal, spoken account.
- 8. **Alliteration:**
 - The poem uses alliteration to create rhythm and draw attention to specific images:
 - “Sleep, and he’s probably armed, possibly not.”
 - “Sun-stunned, sand-smothered land” captures the intensity of the environment and the confusion in the speaker’s mind.
- 9. **Juxtaposition:**
 - The poem juxtaposes past and present experiences to highlight the soldier’s inability to separate his memories from his current reality:
 - The contrast between the speaker’s time “on patrol” and his time “home on leave” shows how the traumatic event has merged into every aspect of his life.
- 10. **Irony:**
 - There is a sense of irony in the line “End of story, except not really.” This suggests that although the physical event is over, the psychological impact is far from finished.
- 11. **Symbolism:**
 - The “blood-shadow” is symbolic of the guilt and trauma that haunt the speaker. It represents the memory of the dead man that the speaker cannot erase.
- 12. **Ambiguity:**
 - The poem’s ambiguity is evident in phrases like “probably armed, possibly not,” which reflect the uncertainty of combat and the moral ambiguity of the soldier’s actions.

Literary Techniques:

1. **Narrative Style:**
 - The poem is written in the first person, creating a sense of immediacy and intimacy. The speaker’s voice is direct and unfiltered, giving readers a glimpse into his thoughts and emotions.
2. **Dramatic Monologue:**
 - “*Remains*” functions as a dramatic monologue, where the speaker reveals his innermost feelings and struggles. The poem’s structure resembles a confession or a therapy session, where the speaker is trying to come to terms with his experiences.
3. **Tone:**

- The tone of the poem shifts from a casual, conversational tone at the beginning to one of horror and regret as the poem progresses. The speaker starts by recounting the incident as if it were just another day at work, but by the end, the tone is one of deep remorse and anguish.
4. **Structure:**
 - The poem is written in eight unrhymed quatrains (four-line stanzas), but the lack of rhyme and regular rhythm reflects the chaotic and fragmented nature of the soldier's thoughts. The final stanza is shorter, signaling a sense of abruptness and incompleteness, mirroring the unresolved trauma.
 5. **Free Verse:**
 - The poem is written in free verse, without a set rhyme scheme or meter, reflecting the disjointed and unpredictable nature of the speaker's mind. The free verse form allows for a natural, conversational flow that matches the speaker's recollection of his experiences.
 6. **Contrast:**
 - The contrast between the speaker's detachment at the beginning and his emotional breakdown at the end highlights the progression of trauma. He starts by narrating the incident as if it were routine, but the guilt gradually consumes him, making the memory inescapable.
 7. **Flashback:**
 - The poem moves back and forth between the past (the killing) and the present (the speaker's trauma), emphasizing the persistent presence of the memory and its ongoing impact on his life.
 8. **Symbolism of Place:**
 - The phrase "some distant, sun-stunned, sand-smothered land" symbolizes the disconnection between the war zone and home. It suggests that although the event happened far away, its effects are deeply rooted in the speaker's current reality.

COMPARISON WITH WAR PHOTOGRAPHER

Comparison of "*Remains*" by Simon Armitage and "*War Photographer*" by Carol Ann Duffy

Simon Armitage's "*Remains*" and Carol Ann Duffy's "*War Photographer*" are two poems that explore the psychological impact of war and violence on individuals. While both poems address the emotional turmoil experienced by people who witness the horrors of war, they approach the subject matter from different perspectives. "*Remains*" is written from the viewpoint of a soldier, whereas "*War Photographer*" presents the perspective of a war photographer. Below is a detailed comparison of these two poems, focusing on context, themes, poetic devices, and literary techniques.

1. Contextual Comparison:

- "*Remains*" by Simon Armitage:

- “*Remains*” is based on the personal experience of a soldier who participated in the Iraq War. The poem deals with the theme of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and guilt, reflecting the speaker’s emotional struggle after killing a man who was “probably armed, possibly not.” The poem highlights the lasting psychological effects of war on soldiers and critiques the way traumatic experiences continue to haunt veterans long after they leave the battlefield.
- **"War Photographer" by Carol Ann Duffy:**
 - “*War Photographer*” was written by Carol Ann Duffy and explores the internal conflict faced by a war photographer who captures images of human suffering and violence in conflict zones. The poem draws attention to the desensitization of society to such images and the moral dilemmas faced by those who document war. The poem reflects on the distance between the reality of war and the safety and comfort of home, as well as the emotional impact on the photographer who must relive these moments through his photographs.

2. Themes:

- **Psychological Trauma:**
 - In “*Remains*”, the psychological trauma is evident through the soldier’s vivid flashbacks and guilt-ridden thoughts. He is haunted by the image of the man he killed, unable to escape the memory even when he is back home.
 - In “*War Photographer*”, the trauma is portrayed through the photographer’s emotional detachment and his struggle to reconcile the suffering he has witnessed with the indifference of those who view his photographs.
- **Guilt and Responsibility:**
 - The soldier in “*Remains*” feels intense guilt for his actions, as shown in the repetition of “probably armed, possibly not.” His guilt is compounded by the realization that the violence was not justified, and he feels personally responsible for taking the man’s life.
 - In “*War Photographer*”, the photographer feels a sense of guilt and helplessness because, despite documenting the suffering of others, he cannot change their circumstances. He questions the value of his work when the images are viewed with fleeting interest by the public.
- **Desensitization and Alienation:**
 - The speaker in “*Remains*” experiences alienation from his own emotions and life. The traumatic memory has made it impossible for him to return to normalcy.
 - In “*War Photographer*”, the photographer feels alienated from both the war zones he photographs and the comfortable life he returns to. He is detached from both worlds and finds himself in a state of emotional limbo.
- **Impact of War:**
 - Both poems address the destructive impact of war, not only on those who directly participate but also on those who witness it. “*Remains*” focuses on the soldier’s personal trauma, while “*War Photographer*” examines the emotional toll on those who document war for the rest of the world to see.

3. Tone and Mood:

- **"Remains":**
 - The tone of "*Remains*" is conversational but shifts to one of anguish and horror as the speaker relives his traumatic experience. The mood is tense, unsettling, and filled with guilt and regret.
- **"War Photographer":**
 - The tone in "*War Photographer*" is reflective and sombre. There is a sense of quiet despair as the photographer processes his photographs, juxtaposed with the indifferent reactions of the public who view his work. The mood is melancholic, emphasizing the futility and emotional cost of his profession.

4. Poetic Devices:

- **Imagery:**
 - "*Remains*" uses vivid, graphic imagery to convey the brutality of war and the horror of the soldier's experience: "I see every round as it rips through his life" and "sort of inside out, pain itself, the image of agony."
 - "*War Photographer*" uses visual imagery to depict the contrast between the war zones and the tranquil setting of the darkroom: "spools of suffering set out in ordered rows" and "A hundred agonies in black-and-white." This imagery emphasizes the emotional burden of capturing these images.
- **Metaphor:**
 - In "*Remains*", "his blood-shadow stays on the street" is a metaphor for the lingering guilt and trauma that haunt the speaker.
 - In "*War Photographer*", "a half-formed ghost" refers to the image of a man in the photograph, symbolizing the way war reduces people to mere shadows or memories.
- **Symbolism:**
 - In "*Remains*", the "blood-shadow" symbolizes the lasting psychological impact of war on the soldier, while the "sand-smothered land" symbolizes the disconnection between the battlefield and home.
 - In "*War Photographer*", the "red light" in the darkroom symbolizes blood and danger, while the "ordered rows" of film represent the photographer's attempt to impose order on the chaos he has witnessed.
- **Simile:**
 - "*Remains*" uses the simile "spits like a tame cat / Turned savage" to describe the violence of the memory that unexpectedly intrudes on the soldier's thoughts.
 - "*War Photographer*" uses the simile "as though this were a church and he / a priest preparing to intone a Mass" to compare the photographer's work to a solemn, almost religious duty, suggesting the gravity of his role.
- **Repetition:**
 - "*Remains*" uses repetition to reflect the soldier's obsessive thoughts and guilt: "probably armed, possibly not" and "his bloody life in my bloody hands."
 - In "*War Photographer*", the repetition of "Rural England" and "ordinary pain" emphasizes the disparity between the comfort of home and the horror of war zones.

5. Structure and Form:

- **"Remains":**

- The poem is composed of eight unrhymed quatrains (four-line stanzas). The lack of rhyme and irregular rhythm reflect the chaotic and fragmented nature of the soldier's thoughts. The final stanza is shorter, signifying the abrupt end and unresolved trauma.
- **"War Photographer":**
 - The poem consists of four stanzas of six lines each, with a regular rhyme scheme (ABBCDD). The rigid structure contrasts with the chaos and disorder depicted in the content of the photographs, emphasizing the photographer's attempt to control and process the violence he has witnessed.

6. Literary Techniques:

- **Contrast:**
 - "*Remains*" contrasts the soldier's life before and after the traumatic event, highlighting how a single moment of violence has altered his perception and reality.
 - "*War Photographer*" contrasts the tranquillity of the darkroom with the horrors depicted in the photographs, creating a juxtaposition between the safety of the present and the chaos of the past.
- **Ambiguity:**
 - In "*Remains*", the ambiguity of "probably armed, possibly not" reflects the uncertainty and moral complexity of warfare, where decisions must be made without clarity.
 - In "*War Photographer*", the ambiguity of the photographer's emotions—detachment, guilt, sorrow—suggests the difficulty of processing the horrors he has seen.
- **Juxtaposition:**
 - "*Remains*" juxtaposes the soldier's attempt to normalize the experience ("End of story, except not really") with the ongoing psychological impact.
 - "*War Photographer*" juxtaposes the reality of war with the apathy of those who view the photographs in comfort, highlighting the emotional and ethical distance between the two worlds.

7. Overall Message:

- **"Remains" by Simon Armitage:**
 - The poem conveys the message that war leaves a lasting psychological impact on those who participate, and the trauma cannot simply be left behind on the battlefield. The speaker's experience is marked by guilt, confusion, and emotional pain, which continue to affect his life long after the event has ended.
- **"War Photographer" by Carol Ann Duffy:**
 - The poem suggests that war photographers bear a heavy burden as they document human suffering. Their work can bring awareness, but it also exposes them to trauma. The poem critiques society's desensitization to the suffering of others and questions the efficacy of photographs in changing public perception or eliciting empathy.

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